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**The transformation of the Syrian
business community after the 2011
uprising: the formation of a
war-induced business diaspora
and the reorganisation of their
networks**

Ching-An Chang

**PhD in Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies
The University of Edinburgh
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Declaration

I confirm that this thesis presented for the degree of PhD in Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies, has

- i) been composed entirely by myself
- ii) been solely the result of my own work
- iii) not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification

Signature

Abstract

This thesis aims to analyse how the Syrian business community has been transformed by the 2011 revolution and how this transformation has had an impact on Syrian business networks. The thesis draws on a range of previous literature on the Syrian business community and on business diaspora in order to set up a triadic analysis framework which includes the interrelations between the host country-home country-diaspora to analyse the transformation of expatriate Syrian businessmen in Turkey, Egypt, and Jordan, as well as using rich ethnographic material collected by the researcher through his nine months of field research in Turkey, Egypt, and Jordan.

The importance of this study lies in the great amount of capital and potential political economic influence of the Syrian business communities in Turkey, Egypt, and Jordan. Even though the economic and political strengths of the expatriate Syrian business community in these three countries have come to light since mid-2012, currently there are no studies focusing on the emergence of expatriate Syrian business communities. Furthermore, Syrian businessmen used to play important roles in Syria prior to their departures after 2011, and their ties with the Assad regime were considered to be symbiotic. The research not only demonstrates a case for the emergence of a war-induced business diaspora, but also retrospectively helps to establish a better understanding of the Syrian business community in the pre-2011 era and the businessmen's reactions towards the unprecedented civil uprising, and later development in the host countries.

It is argued that due to the prolongation and complication of the Syrian conflict, the Syrian business community is developing into a war-induced business diaspora in the countries to which they have relocated, and also played important roles in economic, philanthropic, and political fields in the host countries. Also, the former fragmented Syrian business networks have reorganised into more cooperative and transnationalised networks as a consequence of their relocation and settlement.

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Note on transliteration and translation

This thesis follows the Arabic transliteration system from the International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES).

The well-known English names were applied for place names, such as the cities or countries.

All translations from Arabic interviews are from my own.

Chapter 1 Introduction

This thesis is about the Syrian businessmen who relocated from Syria to Turkey, Egypt, and Jordan after the eruption of the 2011 revolution inside Syria. The aim of this thesis is to analyse how the Syrian business community has been transformed from the reign of al-Assad since 1970 to the on going uprising which has been active since 2011 as a whole, and more specifically, how this transformation has impacted Syrian business networks. The present study will show that the Syrian business community is transforming into a war-induced business diaspora, and that the expatriate Syrian business networks are reorganising from fragmented networks – which were characterised by a large number of small networks that did not trust each other, but inside which, benefited from a great level of trust – into more cooperative and transnationalised networks. The meaning of diaspora in this thesis is based on Roger Brubaker’s definition: the people who disperse from their home countries to another, who are oriented toward the homeland while they are living in host lands, and who maintain the boundaries with the local people in the host countries.¹ Although the community of expatriate Syrian businessmen after 2011 cannot be considered a diaspora (since it has only just recently developed), the concept of diaspora can facilitate the analysis of the development of expatriate Syrian businessmen. The concept of diaspora has been argued to provide a deeper understanding of refugee lives and settlements, since the concept “can bridge the gap between pre-migration and post-migration.”²

¹ Rogers Brubaker, “The ‘Diaspora’ Diaspora,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 28, no. 1 (2005): 1.

² Östen Ragnar Wahlbeck, “Kurdish Refugee Communities: The Diaspora in Finland and England” (PhD’s thesis, University of Warwick, 1997) 216.

Trust has been a primary focus on studies of the Syrian business community, especially regarding the regime–businessmen relationship, since trust crucially had an impact on the business behaviours of Syrian businessmen.³ Top ranking businessmen had symbiotic relationships with the Syrian regime, whereby the Syrian regime required the economic capital of its business community and the business community needed the regime’s support for their business operations.⁴ Nevertheless, in line with the historical context of Syria, the Syrian Sunni businessmen and the ‘Alawites-dominated regime did not trust each other at the group level.⁵ This lack of trust was one of the factors which had influenced the Syrian businessmen either to run their businesses themselves or in the form of family-oriented ventures prior to 2011.⁶ Haddad argued that in pre-revolution Syria, although the pattern of family business operations was not unique, the lack of trust between the regime and its business community reinforced family-oriented business behaviours. In 2001, out of the 24,753 Syrian firms in the private sector, 20,047 (81%) had only between one and five workers.⁷

Nevertheless, after the eruption of the 2011 revolution and with the prolonged and escalated conflict, millions of Syrians have been forced to leave Syria to other countries – among the millions of Syrian refugees who left, thousands have been businessmen. Turkey, Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon have become the primary destinations to which the Syrian business elites have relocated, especially since

³ Volker Perthes, *The Political Economy of Syria under Asad* (London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1997); Bassam Haddad, *Business Networks in Syria: The Political Economy of Authoritarian Resilience* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012).

⁴ Matthew Gray, “Political transformation, economic reform, and tourism in Syria,” in *Mediterranean Tourism: Facets of Socioeconomic Development and Cultural Change*, ed. Yorgos Apostolopoulos, Lila Leontidou, and Philippos Loukissas (London: Routledge, 2001) 139.

⁵ Haddad, *Business Networks in Syria*, 38.

⁶ Ibid. 81-82.

⁷ Ibid.

mid-2012. There were also a few Syrian businessmen who had investment residential permits in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) prior to 2011 and have chosen to resettle there.

Although studies on forced migration and refugees have described those forced migrants and refugees as resourceless or disadvantageous, this study will demonstrate a different perspective from the conventional understanding.⁸ Thousands of migrants and refugees belonged to the business class prior to their emigration and have stronger abilities to resettle in host countries and engage in various fields. Furthermore, the studies on business diaspora focus on the interest-driven business diaspora, except one research work regarding the Somalia business diaspora who left for Kenya due to domestic conflict.⁹ This thesis will demonstrate that the research on business diaspora should not be limited to the one formed due to economic consideration. Rather, under the context of conflict, a business diaspora can also form and develop resiliently in host countries and take part in various economic, charitable, or political activities.

The scale of the emigration of Syrian business from Syria to its neighbouring countries after the eruption of the 2011 revolution was enormous and unprecedented in terms of the numbers of businessmen and of the capital outflow. Since the eruption of the 2011 Syrian revolution, Turkey has become one of the main countries for settlement of Syrian businessmen. It was reported that at the end of March 2013,

⁸ Matthew Howard and Matthew Hodes, "Psychopathology, Adversity, and Service Utilization of Young Refugees," *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 39, no. 3 (2000); Thomas De Vroome and Frank Van Tubergen, "The Employment Experience of Refugees in the Netherlands," *International Migration Review*, 44, no.2 (2010).

⁹ Kenneth Omeje and John Mwangi, "Business Travails in the Diaspora: the Challenges and Resilience of Somali Refugee Business Community in Nairobi, Kenya," *Journal of Third World Studies*, 31, no. 1 (2014).

Turkey-based Syrians had deposited \$4 billion into Turkish banks, and that the capital of the Syrian businessmen in Turkey had grown sharply to \$6.5 billion by the end of 2013.¹⁰ It is believed that thousands of Syrian businessmen fled from Syria to Turkey after 2011 and that more than 10,000 Syrian companies were then established.¹¹ In addition to Turkey, many Syrian businessmen chose Egypt as a primary place of settlement during the first phase of resettlement after the revolution had started in Syria. In mid-2012, the Vice Chairman of the Egyptian Investment Committee, Nevin El-Shafei, stated that “15,000 Syrian investors have investments in several sectors in Egypt, and the food industry accounts for almost half of the Syrian investments in Egypt.”¹² In December 2012, according to ‘Umar al-Ḍaba’, the Coordinator of the Committee on Foreign Relations of the Egyptian Society, Syrian businessmen established 20 spinning factories in Egypt, and the value of each factory varied from \$10 million to \$700 million. In Jordan, although the number of Syrian businessmen was not as great as in Turkey or Egypt, the importance was also not negligible. The number of the registered Syrian companies in Jordan accounted for 25% of the 9,024 foreign registered companies in 2014.¹³ The number of Syrian restaurants in Jordan

¹⁰ Deborah Amos, “Syrian Financial Capital’s Loss Is Turkey’s Gain,” *NPR*, March 29, 2013, accessed March 8, 2017, <http://www.npr.org/2013/03/29/175622297/syrian-financial-capitals-loss-is-turkeys-gain>; Mousa Al Omar, “liqā’āt ṣarīḥa ḥawl rijāl al-a‘māl wa-ḥaqīqat da‘mi-him li-l-sha‘b al-Sūrī,” [Frank meetings about businessmen and the fact that they support the Syrian people] *YouTube*, December 22, 2013, accessed June 24, 2014, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vxlr8sJQ2Uk>.

¹¹ “‘adad al-sharikāt al-Sūriyya fī Turkiyā yatajāwwaz 10 ālāf sharika,” [Number of Syrian companies in Turkey exceeds 10,000 companies] *Turk Press*, December 4, 2015, accessed March 8, 2017, <http://www.turkpress.co/node/12286>.

¹² “Syrian Businesspeople Map.”

¹³ “sharikāt Sūriyya tuwāṣil al-hijra.. ilā al-Urdunn,” [Syrian companies continue to migrate.. to Jordan] *Almodon*, August 21, 2014, accessed March 8, 2017, <http://www.almodon.com/economy/2014/8/21/%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B5%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%87%D8%AC%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%A5%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%86>.

reached 1100 in 2014, with total capital of about 15 million Jordanian dinars (around \$21 million).¹⁴

The massive emigration of Syrian businessmen is significant in terms of the capital they brought with them, and the large numbers of businessmen emigrating includes prominent business figures prior to the 2011 revolution. First, according to the Chairman of the Damascus Chamber of Industry, 150,000 businessmen have left Syria since the year of 2011.¹⁵ The news from the UAE ‘The National’ in February 2012 indicates that “Close to 100 billion Syrian pounds (Dh 6.41bn), more than a fifth of all funds on deposit, have left the Syrian banking system since the conflict began last year,” which is worth around \$2 billion.¹⁶ Second, thousands of Syrian-registered companies were established in the refugee countries following resettlement.¹⁷ Third, not only did modest, but low ranking businessmen leave Syria, but so did many top-ranking tycoons. At least 11 Syrian businessmen from the “100 prominent businessmen list” in 2010 left following the eruption of the revolution in 2011, including: Ghassān Karyam – former president and vice president of Aleppan Chamber of Industry; Muḥammad Ṣabbāgh Sharabātī – former president of Aleppan Chamber of Industry; ‘Adnān al-Nan – former president of Damascus countryside Chamber of Commerce; Muḥammad al-Shā‘ir – former member of the Board of Directors of Damascus Chamber of Industry; ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Da‘būl – whose family

¹⁴ “thaqāfa al-ṭa‘ām al-Sūrī taghzu al-mudun al-‘Urduniyya min khilāl 1100 maṭ‘am,” [Syrian food culture overrun in Jordanian cities through 1100 restaurants] *Eqtsad*, April 13 2015 accessed March 8, 2017, <http://www.eqtsad.net/read/10033/>.

¹⁵ “Syrian Businesspeople Map,” *Syrian Economic Forum*, January 27, 2016, accessed March 15, 2017, <http://www.syrianef.org/En/2016/01/syrian-businessmen-map/>.

¹⁶ Hadeel al Sayegh, “Billions in Bank Funds Take Flight from Syria,” *The National*, February 26, 2012, accessed March 15, 2017, <http://www.thenational.ae/business/economy/billions-in-bank-funds-take-flight-from-syria>.

¹⁷ Anadolu Agency, “akbar 10 rijāl a‘māl Sūrīyīn yahrabūn ilā Miṣr,” [Top 10 Syrian businessmen flee to Egypt] *Al Arabiya*, December 3, 2012, accessed March 8, 2017, <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/12/03/253096.html>.

owns the strongest industrial cleaning trade mark ‘Madar’ in Syria; Khālīd al-‘Ulabī – member of the People Assembly and an active member of the Aleppo Chamber of Industry and Federation of Syrian Chambers of Industry; Ḥusayn Bādīnjkī – former president of Aleppo Chamber of Commerce; ‘Ammār Ṣabbāgh – from one of the biggest industrial and commercial families in Aleppo working in the field of blankets, real estate, and tourism, also owned the biggest shopping centre in Aleppo; Zuhayr Sayf – from an old industrial Syrian family in the ready-made clothing industry; Firās Ṭallās – the son of the former Syrian Defence Minister, Muṣṭafā Ṭallās, who was a business tycoon in the Syrian market; and Zuhayr Saḥlūl – from the biggest Syrian family working in money exchange.¹⁸ This suggests that not only did a great number of Syrian businessmen leave Syria during the revolution period, but also that there were businessmen who used to be rich and important economic players inside the country were also among the emigrants.

This massive and rapid outflow of Syrian businessmen and their capital from Syria to neighbouring countries has not only had a significant impact on the Syrian economy, but has also led to the emergence of new expatriate Syrian business communities in the host countries. Furthermore, the emigration of top Syrian businessmen has challenged the former symbiotic relationship between the Syrian regime and the economic elites in the business community. For example, in addition to the 11 prominent businessmen listed above who left Syria after 2011, many were politically opposed to the Bashar regime, including Ayman Asfari and Walīd al-Zu‘bi – who were also listed on the top 100 businessmen list and were based outside of Syria prior

¹⁸ Interviews and personal observation.

to the year of 2011 – as well as thousands of less influential Syrian businessmen who fled Syria.

1.1 Purpose of the study

The main research question of this thesis is: *how has the Syrian business community been transformed from the reign of Assad through the 2011 uprising to the on-going exile as a whole, and more specifically, how has this transformation had an impact on Syrian business networks?* In order to understand the transformation of the Syrian business community, the first question to be addressed is: what did the pre-revolution Syrian business community look like? From this, few more questions arise: what happened to the Syrian businessmen after the eruption of the revolution in 2011 and how did they react towards the unprecedented massive uprising in the country? How and why did they decide to flee Syria and resettle in other countries? What made them embark on different economic, philanthropic, or political activities and in which ways? These questions will be examined in three parts depending on the different spatiotemporal contexts: the Syrian business community in the pre-revolution period, the period from the eruption of the revolution to expatriation and further settlement in the host countries, and the post-settlement period from the onset of different activities in the host countries.

First, in order to understand how the Syrian business community has been transformed from peace to conflict, a delineation of the former features of Syrian business community must be examined. The networking of Syrian businessmen used to be fragmented due to the political-economic environment within Syria.

Corruption combined with nepotism, legal insecurity accompanied by state intervention into businessmen's activities, and a lack of efficiency and opaqueness in the public sectors were the three main factors that made this network fragmented. Nevertheless, Syrian businessmen had developed their own specific mechanisms such as non-interest loans and informal arbitrations to avoid dealing with the banking and judiciary systems that they did not trust. Furthermore, since the relationships between the Syrian regime and its business community used to be a crucial factor in deciding the results of the Syrian businessmen's economic performance, it is important to categorise the Syrian businessmen into four groups based on their relationships with the Assad regime: ruling family, crony businessmen, strategic businessmen, and independent businessmen. As such, this will not only include the low-profile majority Syrian businessmen into the discussion, but this categorisation will also be used as a basis for analysing the different political reactions of the Syrian businessmen towards the 2011 revolution and how do they engage in political activities after they relocated into the host countries. In addition to economic activities, it is also important to demonstrate the active participation of Syrian businessmen in philanthropic works and the limited political participation in the pre-revolution era. Since the Syrian businessmen not only used to play important economic roles in Syria prior to the revolution, but they also provided important contributions to charities and participated, in a limited fashion, in the People's Assembly election in the country prior to the revolution.¹⁹ The participation of Syrian businessmen in businesses, charities and politics in the pre-2011 Syria will be discussed later in the following chapter. The analysis of the pre-revolution Syrian business community will provide a primary basis

¹⁹ Thomas Pierret and Kjetil Selvik, "Limits of "Authoritarian Upgrading" in Syria: Private Welfare, Islamic Charities, and the Rise of the Zayd Movement," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 41, no. 4 (2009).

in order to trace the qualitative changes that happened to the Syrian business community through the 2011 event.

Second, when the revolution started in Syria in 2011, former state-business relationships started to change from being symbiotic to the business class deserting their former patrons. Not only did some businessmen devote themselves to the anti-Assad campaign, but the massive outflow of Syrian businessmen also indicated this desertion of Syrian businessmen from their former patrons. The partial participation of the Syrian businessmen in the anti-Assad activities and the massive outflow of Syrian businessmen from Syria to its neighbouring countries deserve a deeper understanding to unpack the reasons behind this 'betrayal.' Furthermore, from the perspective of migration study, it has been argued that the context of the refugee community is important because it will, to a certain extent, affect later operations in the host countries.²⁰ Thus, digging into the context of relocation and settlement can provide a more comprehensive understanding of why, how, and what the exiled Syrian businessmen went through during the revolution and the build up of their new lives in foreign lands. As such, an investigation of the uprising and exiled context of the expatriate Syrian businessmen from Syria to their host countries may facilitate the understanding of why a particular group of people in a particular location might partake in certain types of decisions. This would not only explain the transformation of the former state-businessmen relationships in Syria during the revolution, but it would also demonstrate the ways in which the economic elites who held strong

²⁰ Nadjé Al-Ali, Richard Black and Khalid Koser, "The Limits to 'Transnationalism': Bosnian and Eritrean Refugees in Europe as Emerging Transnational Communities," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 24, no. 4 (2001): 593; Hazel Smith, "Diasporas in International Conflict," in *Diasporas in conflict: Peace-Makers or Peace-Wreckers?* ed. Hazel Smith and Paul Stares (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2007) 9.

economic and social capital would go on to form new business communities in the host countries.

On the one hand, the reactions from the Syrian business community towards the revolution demonstrate that although the majority of the Syrian businessmen remained non-reactive during the revolution, there were some Syrian businessmen who actively supported this unprecedented civil uprising in the country. Yet, due to the worsening of the conditions of security, economy, and politics following the escalations of conflict, many Syrian businessmen decided to flee. Although personal networks were argued as an important factor affecting the emigration and settlement process of the migrants, the routes of emigration of the Syrian businessmen also demonstrated how the importance of political relations between host and home governments affected the ways in which people decided where to relocate, as did distance, economic structures in the host countries, and personal networks.²¹ More importantly, the significance of economic consideration surpassed other previously suggested factors, including personal networks.

On the other hand, originally migrants needed to deal with different challenges after they settled into the host countries. The beginning of the settlement also demonstrates various legal, political, and social constraints created by the structural conditions within host countries against the settlement of Syrian businessmen. Furthermore,

²¹ Monica Boyd, "Family and Personal Networks in International Migration: Recent Developments and New Agendas," *The International Migration Review*, 23, no.3 (1989): 645; Michael P. Smith, Bernadette Tarallo, and George Kagiwada, "Colouring California: New Asian Immigrant Households, Social Networks and the Local State," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 15, no.2 (1991): 254; Nasra M. Shah and Indu Menon, "Chain Migration Through the Social Network: Experience of Labour Migrants in Kuwait," *International Migration*, 37, no.2 (1999): 370; Joaquin Arango, "Explaining Migration: A Critical View," *International Social Science Journal* (2000): 291; Sutama Ghosh, "Transnational Ties and Intra-immigrant Group Settlement Experiences," *GeoJournal*, 68, no. 2 (2007): 225.

although migrants initially had the expectation of a quick return to their home countries, their expectations during the settlement process gradually transformed to long-term residence due to the dim economy, lack of security and the irreparable conditions of their estates in Syria.²²

Third, diaspora as a social form includes different characteristics: social relationships, political orientations, and economic strategies.²³ The settlement of Syrian business communities in host countries after the 2011 revolution conforms to this feature, which they conduct in various fields of activities including businesses, charities, and politics. This suggests that the expatriate Syrian businessmen were in an early phase of transnational community formation. Thus, the concept of diaspora as a social form can facilitate the analysis of the multiple dimensions of expatriate Syrian businessmen, who were not only practicing these different activities in the diaspora, but were also mentally and physically bound to those of their homeland. The participation of expatriate Syrian businessmen in different activities indicates another transformation: a change from primarily business activities to having various types of activities, which included political and philanthropic activities.

From the examination of the economic investments of the expatriate Syrian businessmen, it will be argued that Syrian businessmen have not only migrated physically to their host countries, but also that, to a certain extent, the specific ways of thinking and acting have migrated with the businessmen to the host countries and have continued to affect their behaviours in the host lands. Syrian businessmen

²² Kristian Berg Harpviken, *Social Networks and Migration in Wartime Afghanistan* (Houndmills: Palgrave macmillan, 2009) 76

²³ Steven Vertovec, "Three Meanings of "Diaspora," Exemplified among South Asian Religions," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, 6, no. 3 (1997): 277-81.

continued to maintain fragmented trust in their networks and used other pre-2011 mechanisms which they had applied to their business lives before their exile. Nevertheless, due to the lack of capital in the host countries with expectations of business improvement, many Syrian businessmen attempted to overcome that lack of trust in the business community, and ended up building new networks and associations with other Syrian businessmen. Political, economic, and social considerations were the three main criteria for improving trust among expatriate Syrian businessmen regarding their business networking. The expatriate Syrian businessmen not only seek help from previous acquaintances, but, more specifically, they prefer to seek help from people who were from the same cities as they were. Finally, due to the host countries' environments, businessmen have needed to adjust some of their practices to get accustomed to different legal and business institutions in host countries as other migrants have done.²⁴ However, the expatriate Syrian businessmen still preserve specific ways of thinking or acting in the host countries by assessing the conditions in the host countries to see how their previous thought patterns or actions could secure them a better position.

Regarding the philanthropic and political participations of the expatriate Syrian businessmen, it will be argued that the continuation of philanthropic activities and political emancipation of the decades-long, low-politicised Syrian business community were formed under the context of revolution and expatriation. But different from other diasporans or migrants who engage in charities, those expatriate Syrian businessmen not only provided help to their fellow countrymen in their home country, but they also did not neglect the needs of their fellow countrymen who fled

²⁴ Catherine Harris, "Entrepreneurship Amongst Polish Migrants in the West Midlands" (PhD's thesis, University of Birmingham, 2012) 285-326.

to the host countries. Regarding diaspora political participation, those who devoted themselves in homeland politics are mostly those who left their homeland decades ago.²⁵ Nevertheless, for the expatriate Syrian businessmen who participated in anti-Assad political activities, it was not only the long-term exiled businessmen who took part, but the businessmen who left after 2011 did so too. The experience of participating in politics before leaving Syria in 2011 helped this group to participate after they relocated to the host countries. Furthermore, these activities have moved from a local level in Syria to a cross-border level between Syria and the countries to which Syrian businessmen relocated, or even to a transnational level where Syrian businessmen from different countries can devote themselves to the same activities. This may include dynamic input from the former exiled Syrian businessmen who had departed Syria prior to the 2011 revolution. Finally, even though most expatriate Syrian businessmen have devoted themselves to philanthropic works and some of them have actively taken part in anti-Assad political activities, fragmented networking among Syrian businessmen and a low willingness to engage with political issues are, to a certain extent, still significant.

²⁵ Östen Wahlbeck, *Kurdish Diasporas: A Comparative Study of Kurdish Refugee Communities* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999); Øivind Fuglerud, *Life on the Outside: The Tamil Diaspora and Long-Distance Nationalism* (London: Pluto Press, 1999); Wayland, "Ethnonationalist Networks;" James A. Tyner and Olaf Kuhlke, "Pan-national Identities: Representations of the Philippine Diaspora on the World Wide Web," *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*, 41, no. 3 (2000); Ann M. Lesch, "Palestinians in Kuwait," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 20, no. 4 (1991); Kate Gillespie, "Edward Sayre and Liesl Riddle, Palestinian Interest in Homeland Investment," *Middle East Journal*, 55, no. 2 (2001); Schulz Helena Lindholm and Juliane Hammer, *The Palestinian Diaspora* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2003); Rina Cohen, "From Ethnonational Enclave to Diasporic Community: The Mainstreaming of Israeli Jewish Migrants in Toronto," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, 8, no. 2 (1999); Alex Weingrod and André Levy, "Social Thought and Commentary: Paradoxes of Homecoming: The Jews and Their Diasporas," *Anthropological Quarterly*, 79, no. 4 (2006); Susan P. Pattie, "Longing and Belonging: issues of homeland in the Armenian diaspora," *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review*, 22, no. 2 (1999); Tatoul Manaseryan, *Diaspora: the Comparative Advantage for Armenia, Working paper no 04/14*, Armenian International Policy Research Group (2004).

1.2 Literature on Syrian business community and business diaspora and the triadic analysis

The timeframe of this research starts with the Syrian business community in the pre-2011 revolution and continues with the community's later relocation from Syria to neighbouring countries. Since Wahlbeck argues that the concept of diaspora is helpful for analysing the livelihood of refugees in host countries, this section will not only review the relevant literature on the Syrian business community, but also the literature on business diaspora.²⁶

On the one hand, reviewing literature on the Syrian business community will demonstrate that the role of the Assad regime has always been one of the most important elements in studying the Syrian business community. It will also indicate a gap in previous studies on Syrian businessmen, that is, they over-emphasised prominent businessmen and ignored the bigger picture of the Syrian business community. There were many other economically strong, but low-profile, businessmen who were not included in previous studies. On the other hand, the review of literature on the business diaspora will show that the business diaspora used to play important economic or political roles with their home and host countries. However, it will also show that the previous literature on business diaspora lacks analysis of war-induced business diasporas, and hardly discusses how the relations between host-home countries influence the formation of diasporas. Finally, the conceptual framework of this research – the triadic analysis which includes the

²⁶ Wahlbeck, "Kurdish Refugee Communities."

interrelationships between the host country-home country-diaspora – will be developed based on the reflection of the literature.

a. Studies on Syrian businessmen before 2011

Previous literature on Syrian businessmen is scarce, and there are no academic studies on Syrian businessmen after their emigrations since 2011. Most studies related to Syrian businessmen focus on Syrian economic reform, rather than the Syrian business community itself. The structure of this section is made up of two parts based on the main approach of the former studies, which are, the state-centric approach and the network approach. The former is a macro-perspective approach for analysing the Syrian economy, and the latter on the other hand examines the activities of businessmen, including richer field research which reflects a clearer picture and has more detailed information about the Syrian business community than the state-centric approach.

State-Centric Approach

The literature that adopts a state-centric approach does not discuss Syrian businessmen directly, but focuses on the causality and problems of Syria's economic liberalisation and transition or evaluation of reforms. To some extent, this approach illustrates how the role of the Syrian regime affected the development of the business class before 2011, and the main considerations of the regime in terms of the reforming process was still regime survival.

Most scholars agree that the inadequate social and economic bases created by the Assad's ruling clan since the 1970s led to the first *infatih* in the early 1970s, since the regime clearly acknowledged the demands for economic productivity from the private sector; however, the main consideration of the regime regarding the reform was not economic growth, but rather the maintenance of its political power as Perthes and Hinnebusch have suggested.²⁷ Hinnebusch and Haddad demonstrated that this process of economic liberalisation was conducted in a selective way. Perthes argues that the state's selective economic liberalisation affected only a particular group of businessmen and fragmented the private sector.²⁸ Haddad, Polling, and Sadowski demonstrated that only the people who have close ties to the Syrian regime could have access to mixed sectors.²⁹

Despite the fact that Syrian businessmen accumulated more wealth in the 1980s' period of economic liberalisation than in that of the 1970s, Perthes argued that most industries were still maintained in the hand of the public sector.³⁰ He interpreted the 1980s *infatih* as an alliance between the regime's elites and a specific bourgeoisie.³¹ He also argues that economic reform was directed toward a corporatist model, yet for example, the board members of the Chamber and the General Federation of Trade Union were decided upon by the government. Under this restricted opening, not only

²⁷ Volker Perthes, "The Syrian Private Industrial and Commercial Sectors and the State," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 24, no.2 (1992): 209-211; Raymond A Hinnebusch, *Syria: Revolution from Above* (London: Routledge, 2001) 56-62.

²⁸ Volker Perthes, "Stages of Economic and Political Liberalization," in *Contemporary Syria: Liberalization between Cold War and Cold Peace*, ed. Eberhard Kienle (London: British Academic Press, 1994) 49.

²⁹ Bassam Haddad, "The Syrian Regime's Business Backbone," *Middle East Report* 42 no.1 (2012): 26; Sylvia Polling, "Investment Law No. 10: Which Future for the Private Sector?" in *Contemporary Syria: Liberalization between Cold War and Cold Peace*, ed. Eberhard Kienle (London: British Academic Press, 1994) 16-21; Yahya M. Saowski, "Patronage and the Ba'th: Corruption and Control in Contemporary Syria," *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 9, no.4 (1987): 449.

³⁰ Perthes, *The Political Economy*, 58.

³¹ *Ibid.* 67.

was a 'new class' formed in which the constituencies were supported by the regime and which obeyed the instructions of the ruling elites, but the political elites were embourgeoisied either by transferring from the political to the economic sector or by intervening in the activities of private businesses.³²

Even though Hopfinger and Boeckler seemed optimistic towards economic liberalisation and contend that Syria was moving from a state-planned economy to a free market, this appears to have been premature.³³ Since even until 2005, the different economic reforms under the reign of Bashar al-Assad continued to apply similar strategies as his father, Hafiz, where the state still intervened and disallowed a prosperous private sector that might threaten its stability, as Marshall has shown.³⁴ Hinnebusch further argued that even though the regime claimed to apply the theory of the social market economy in Syria in 2005, they did not provide any clear plans regarding the transition, which has been called as a 'failed transition'.³⁵

The state-centric approach of the studies has a strong top-down emphasis where the literature mostly focuses on the nature of the reforms and how the regime had an impact on the development of Syrian businessmen in the pre-2011 era, as Perthes and Hinnebusch have demonstrated.³⁶ This suggests that to analyse the transformation of Syrian businessmen, the role of the Syrian regime should be taken into consideration,

³² Hinnebusch, "Syria: The Politics of Economic Liberalisation," *Third World Quarterly*, 18, no.2 (1997): 85-9, 253-55.

³³ Hans Hopfinger and Marc Boeckler, "Step by Step to an Open Economic System: Syria sets Course for Liberation," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 23, no. 2 (1996): 183-202.

³⁴ Shana Marshall, "Syria and the Financial Crisis: Prospects for Reform?" *Middle East Policy*, 16, no. 2 (2009): 112.

³⁵ Raymond Hinnebusch, "Syria: from 'authoritarian upgrading' to revolution?" *International Affairs*, 88, no. 1 (2012): 98.

³⁶ Hinnebusch, *Syria: Revolution from Above*; Perthes, *The Political Economy of Syria under Asad*; Volker Perthes, *Syria under Bashar al-Asad: Modernisation and the Limits of Change* (London: Oxford University Press, 2004).

since almost no businessmen could avoid the regime in their business activities. Nevertheless, the state-centric level approach oversimplifies the businessmen as a whole, and, therefore, it cannot reflect the inner dynamics of the business community.

Network Approach

The literature on the network approach not only has more extensive empirical research than the state-centric approach for analysing the situation of the businessmen, but it also to a certain extent, looks inside the business community itself and further categorises the businessmen into different groups. The rich empirical evidence and interpretation of the relationship between the business community and the regime provide a more detailed observation which is necessary for the study of the current businessmen than the state-centric approach.

As Haddad and Selvik have demonstrated, the fact that the structure of private businesses was usually small or family-run was a consequence of the lack of trust between the state and the private sector.³⁷ Moreover, Boissière and Anderson have showed that at the end of the 1990s, Syrian businessmen generally depended on their families' trust or professional networking to create great amounts of money.³⁸ A more recent study from Haddad analyses the relationship between the regime and business sector between 1986 and 2005. He argues that the low-trust system between

³⁷ Bassam Haddad, "Enduring Legacies: the Politics of Private Sector Development in Syria," in *Demystifying Syria*, ed. Fred Haley Lawson (London: Saqi, 2009) 46-7; Kjetil Selvik, "It's the Mentality, Stupid! Syria's Turn to the Private Sector," in *Changing Regime Discourse and Reform in Syria*, ed. Aurora Sottimano and Kjetil Selvik (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2008) 47.

³⁸ Thierry Boissière and Paul Anderson, "Trust and Uncertainty in Syrian Commerce: the Success and Failure of a Businessman in Aleppo, 1980s-2009," in *Alep et ses territoires. Fabrique et politique d'une ville, 1868 – 2011*, ed. Jean-Claude David and Thierry Boissière (Presses de l'Ifpo, 2013).

the two sides constrained the private sector's development which led to selective development and the high dependency of the private sector on the government. Although he contends that the year of 2005 was an important year for Syria because Bashar consolidated his power, his work does not deal with what happened after Bashar's consolidation of power.³⁹

In addition, the network approach presented a similar argument to the state-centric approach with the unwillingness of the regime to allow a strong private sector in Syria. This is because a strong private sector could exceed the control of the regime. Therefore, as Bahout has argued, it was another constraint for the businessmen.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, Ismail argues that the alliance between the regime and businessmen was deteriorating and could have eventually dissolved, while the alliance between the religious people and merchants could have been revived.⁴¹ The businessmen not only needed the support of the regime, but they also needed the prestige and trust from religious groups.⁴² This dependency suggests that the study of the network of Syrian businessmen should not only observe the relationship between the regime and private sectors, but should also take the influence of religious factors into consideration.

Furthermore, the limited political participation of Syrian businessmen has been studied. As Perthes demonstrated from the 1990 parliamentary election, three groups of people from the elected independent candidates can be distinguished: the upper

³⁹ Haddad, *Business Networks in Syria*.

⁴⁰ Joseph Bahout, "The Syrian Business Community, its Politics and Prospects," in *Contemporary Syria: Liberalization between Cold War and Cold Peace*, ed. Eberhard Kienle (London: British Academic Press, 1994) 72.

⁴¹ Salwa Ismail, "Changing Social Structure, Shifting Alliances and Authoritarianism in Syria," in *Demystifying Syria*, ed. Fred Haley Lawson (London: Saqi, 2009) 14.

⁴² Pierret and Selvik, "Limits of "Authoritarian Upgrading"," 605-07.

middle class includes lawyers and academics, the traditional leaders include religious and tribal figures, and the merchants and bourgeoisie. Perthes argues that this was due to the important role of the private sector which the regime had realised then gave them a limited say in policy making.⁴³ However, as Selvik indicated, most business people have little interest in politics, or even if they were elected as parliamentarians they gave weak performances in the parliament.⁴⁴ In 2012, one year after the eruption of the 2011 revolution, Haddad contended that there were no significant defections from the big businessmen in Damascus or Aleppo due to the decade-long regime-business alliance.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, this argument contradicts the fact that at least 11 top businessmen did leave Syria, as I have already shown in the beginning of this chapter.

Another trend in the network approach of the literature of Syrian businessmen is that it has categorised or used categorisation to analyse the structure of the Syrian business community. These previous categorisations provided general concepts about Syrian businessmen. Researchers used the criteria of emerging timing, economic sectors, and political proximity with the Syrian regime to categorise the Syrian businessmen into four groups, which are, the *old bourgeoisie* – the ones whose roots can be traced back to the landowning bureaucratic class of the late Ottoman Empire and whose wealth was strengthened during the French Mandate period (the division between the ‘old’ and ‘new’ is roughly divided by the year of 1963);⁴⁶ the *new middle class* (the new industrialists/ upper middle class merchants) – different scholars have used different

⁴³ Volker Perthes, “Syria’s Parliamentary Elections: Remodeling Asad’s Political Base,” *Middle East Report*, no. 174 (1992): 17-8.

⁴⁴ Selvik, “It’s the Mentality, Stupid!” 50-1.

⁴⁵ Haddad, “The Syrian Regime’s Business Backbone.”

⁴⁶ Ibid. 31-3; Volker Perthes, “A Look at Syria’s Upper Class: The Bourgeoisie and the Ba’th,” *Middle East Report*, no. 170 (1991): 33.

words to describe this group of businessmen but generally they were indicating the same group. This group benefitted from the economic opening in the 1970s under Hafiz's leadership, and their wealth and influence surpassed the old bourgeoisie as a direct result of the *infitah* policy;⁴⁷ the *new commercial class* – this group emerged only after 1973. It benefitted from the *infitahs* in 1973 and in the late 1980s. Their rise was attributed to personal ties with people in the regime;⁴⁸ and the *state bourgeoisie* –the members of this group were from the Syrian regime or had key positions in the regime's bureaucratic apparatus or military. They not only had significant political and economic power, but also had extreme wealth which may have even surpassed that of the old bourgeoisie.⁴⁹

Although the previous categorisation did provide an analytical explanation of the Syrian business community prior to 2011, to a certain extent, it overly focuses on the prominent businessmen which are the so-called state bourgeoisie and the crony businessmen, and the businessmen who become extremely rich through exploiting their privileged networks with the regime. Even though Haddad categorises one group of businessmen as the independent businessmen, his work mostly remained on the discussion of the prominent businesspeople.⁵⁰ Since many Syrian businessmen were forced to work under the radar and to cover their wealth due to the tense socio-political environment, the categorisation does not sufficiently touch on the majority but low-profile business people. Even though the top businessmen owned much more economic capital, this does not mean that the rest of the majority socially-politically modest businessmen's political strength and socio-economic

⁴⁷ Perthes, "A Look at Syria's Upper Class," 33.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 35-6.

⁴⁹ Bahout, "The Syrian Business Community," 75; Perthes, "A Look at Syria's Upper Class," 34.

⁵⁰ Haddad, *Business Networks in Syria*.

importance were negligible. For instance, many businessmen invested in different sectors with a smaller amount of capital in order to distribute their capital into different sectors.⁵¹ This indicates that many businessmen who invested under radar were also economically wealthy, even though they may not have been as rich as the top businesspeople who had gained extreme wealth through nepotistic ties or illegal activities, or who held big shares in a specific field.

Furthermore, the former categorisations rely on the features of the businessmen who become extremely wealthy during the *infitah* during the 1970s and 1980s. They were categorised into the so-called new class businessmen or state bourgeoisie. Yet these categorisations by timeframe overlook the fact that the *infitah* inside Syria not only benefited the state and crony businessmen, but also the ‘merchant upper middle class’ who played an important economic role in Syria but were relatively modest in political and economic stance. This segment of the business class has been largely ignored in the literature, with the exception of Droz-Vincent work.⁵² Thus, a revision of the former studies of the structure of Syrian business community to include this majority modest merchant upper middle class is important for understanding the pre-revolution Syrian business community’s nature, and it would facilitate the explanation of their developments after the eruption of 2011 revolution.

In addition, the categorisation of businessmen by economic sector, which Perthes suggests as new industrialists and commercialists, cannot reflect the fact that there

⁵¹ Interviews.

⁵² Referenced by Pierret and Selvik, see Pierret and Selvik, “Limits of “Authoritarian Upgrading”,” 599.

were many businessmen who invested in more than one business sector. Either industrialist or commercialist, businessmen were not deemed to have the same attributes as Perthes suggests. For example, Perthes states, "...the old bourgeoisie emphasized heavy industry – electrical generation, water, sugar refining and processing, textile weaving and manufacturing – the new industrialists are almost entirely restricted to light and finishing industries."⁵³ Nevertheless, the example of businessmen Muḥammad Ṣabbāgh Sharabātī, Khālīd al-‘Ulabī, and Ghassān Karyam, are working in the heavy industrial field, as textile and refrigerators, and they are not from the old bourgeoisie class. Thus, a categorisation based on the economic sectors may oversimplify the dynamic of Syrian businessmen’s investment.

Finally and more importantly, the eruption of the revolution in 2011 sent thousands of businessmen into exile, along with their economic capital. Nevertheless, the former categorisation does not illustrate any clear picture regarding these expatriate businessmen since most of the businessmen who are included in the categorizations are cronies or entrepreneurs who overly depended on the regime and did not leave Syria.

The literature on Syrian businessmen indicates that whether by the state-centric or network approach, the role of the Assad regime in the development of the Syrian business community is crucial. Nevertheless, the previous literature overly focuses on the prominent business elites, which neglected the majority modest, but economically important, business people. Even though the network approach conducted by Haddad

⁵³ Perthes, "A Look at Syria's Upper Class," 33.

looks further into the relationships between the regime and its business community and points out the lack of trust on both sides, the networking among the Syrian businessmen have been even less touched on.⁵⁴ Thus, this research on the transformation of the Syrian business community not only needs to take the regime's role into consideration, but also requires further research into the former majority, but low-profile, businessmen and their networks to fill the gaps.

b. Studies on business diaspora

The study of diaspora can be found in subjects as diverse as politics, economics, sociology, literature, and religion. Since the late 1980s, research on diaspora has become more prevalent.⁵⁵ The term diaspora originates from the Greek word *diaspeiro*, literally meaning to disperse or to scatter.⁵⁶ Even though the semantic meaning of the term seems to be simple, the definition of the term 'diaspora' and its concepts vary from scholar to scholar, as Tölölyan demonstrates the shifting discourse on diaspora and further argues that the diaspora is "in danger of becoming a promiscuously capacious category."⁵⁷ The debate over the definition of 'diaspora' has moved from a restricted to a broad concept. Safran limits the meaning of diaspora to six characteristics: people or their ancestors who were dispersed from a specific centre to two or more peripheries; people who possess a collective memory of their original homeland; people who think they cannot, or actually cannot, be fully

⁵⁴ Haddad, *Business Networks in Syria*.

⁵⁵ Brubaker, "The 'Diaspora' Diaspora," 1.

⁵⁶ Ato Quayson and Girish Daswani, "Introduction - Diaspora and Transnationalism: Scapes, Scales, and Scopes," in *A Companion to Diaspora and Transnationalism*, ed. Ato Quayson and Girish Daswani (Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell Publishing, 2013) 8.

⁵⁷ Khachig Tölölyan, "Rethinking Diaspora (s): Stateless Power in the Transnational Moment," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, 5, no. 5 (1996): 8.

accepted inside a host country; people who consider the home country to be their ideal home and who would return if they could; people who need to commit to the maintenance of their homeland; and people who continuously relate themselves with their homeland while they are physically away from it. In terms of this definition, the only ‘ideal type’ which conforms to this strict frame is the Jewish Diaspora.⁵⁸

However, many scholars believe that the concept of diaspora should be more inclusive yet not wantonly developed without limits.⁵⁹ Tölölyan suggests that “we use ‘diaspora’ provisionally to indicate our belief that the term that once described Jewish, Greek, and Armenian dispersions now shares meanings with a larger semantic domain that includes words like immigrant, expatriate, refugee, guest worker, exile community, overseas community, and ethnic community.”⁶⁰ Clifford even argues that “we should be wary of constructing our working definition of a term like diaspora by recourse to an ‘ideal type.’”⁶¹ Gorman and Kasbarian suggest the working definition of diaspora should be “one that respects its historical and etymological roots but is open to new creative uses, within the broad triadic (homeland–diaspora–host state) parameters.”⁶²

⁵⁸ William Safran, “Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return,” *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, 1, no. 1 (1991): 83,84.

⁵⁹ Khachig Tölölyan, “The Nation-State and Its Others: In Lieu of a Preface,” *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, 1, no. 1 (1991): 4,5; James Clifford, “Diasporas,” *Cultural Anthropology*, 9, no. 3 (1994): 306,310; Brubaker, “The ‘Diaspora’ Diaspora,” 3; Stéphane Dufoix, *Diasporas*, trans. William Rodarmor (London: University of California Press, 2003) 2; Thomas Faist, “Diaspora and Transnationalism: What Kind of Dance Partners?” in *Diaspora and Transnationalism: Concepts, Theories and Methods*, ed. Rainer Bauböck and Thomas Faist (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University, 2010) 9.

⁶⁰ Tölölyan, “The Nation-State and Its Others,” 4.

⁶¹ Clifford, “Diasporas,” 306.

⁶² Anthony Gorman and Sossie Kasbarian, “Introduction: Diasporas of the Modern Middle East – Contextualising Community,” in *Diasporas of the Modern Middle East: Contextualising Community*, ed. Anthony Gorman and Sossie Kasbarian (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015) 9.

Brubaker identifies three criteria for the concept of diaspora: dispersion, homeland orientation, and boundary-maintenance.⁶³ These three criteria can be found in all scholarly discussions regarding the concepts of diaspora, either directly or indirectly. Dispersion is a self-evident phenomenon that indicates a group of people moving from their homeland (voluntarily or forcedly) to other countries.⁶⁴ However, this kind of exile should be developed in a multi-generational way with a durability that can be considered to be diaspora.⁶⁵ In addition, the homeland orientation indicates the political, economic, and social ties between the diaspora community and their home country.⁶⁶ This makes diaspora distinct from migration.⁶⁷ Furthermore, Brubaker argues that “boundary-maintenance is an indispensable criterion of diaspora.”⁶⁸ It is the identity of the diaspora community that makes them conspicuous in the host society. Thus, many diaspora studies are based on a national unit of analysis to elaborate on further discussion. For instance, Sheffer’s research on ethno-national diaspora is a typical case.⁶⁹ In addition to the three criteria definition of diaspora, Cohen classifies diasporas into five groups: victim, labour, imperial, trade, and de-territorialised.⁷⁰ However, Safran argues that this typology “permits one to label virtually all expatriate groups as diasporas.”⁷¹

⁶³ Brubaker, “The ‘Diaspora’ Diaspora,” 5-7.

⁶⁴ Dufoix, *Diasporas*, 21.

⁶⁵ Faist, “Diaspora and Transnationalism,” 22; Quayson and Daswani, “Introduction - Diaspora and Transnationalism,” 3.

⁶⁶ Nicholas Van Hear, *New Diasporas: The Mass Exodous, Dispersal and Regrouping of Migrant Communities* (London: University College London Press, 1998) 6, 56, 57.

⁶⁷ Quayson and Daswani, “Introduction - Diaspora and Transnationalism,” 5.

⁶⁸ Brubaker, “The ‘Diaspora’ Diaspora,” 6.

⁶⁹ Gabriel Sheffer, *Diaspora Politics: At Home Abroad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 1-31; Brubaker, “The ‘Diaspora’ Diaspora,” 6.

⁷⁰ Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2008).

⁷¹ Safran, “Diasporas in Modern Societies,” 265.

In this thesis, these three criteria delineated by Brubaker will be applied in order to examine the expatriate Syrian business community since not only do these three criteria comprise important variables of a diaspora, but they also have been defined by other scholars. The expatriate Syrian businessmen have been dispersed to Syria's various neighbouring countries. As such, in addition to the dispersion, the homeland orientation and boundary-maintenance must be further examined to determine how the Syrian business community has been transformed into a war-induced business diaspora after the 2011 revolution.

1) Impacts of diaspora

Most studies on diaspora focus on the diasporas' abilities and the impact that a diaspora has on the home or host countries. On the one hand, a diaspora is considered to be an agent of development, wherein previous scholars argue that such communities can play an important role in the development of their original country and that their influences may even reach an international level.⁷² On the other hand, it has been argued that these transnational communities are peace destroyers which deteriorate their country's domestic stability and even prolong civil wars under certain circumstances.⁷³ This may be due to their historical context and to the diaspora's conditions of settlement, since these are important elements that influence their further development.⁷⁴ Since the spatiotemporal background of the formation of

⁷² Thomas Faist, "Transnationalization and Development: Toward an Alternative Agenda," *Social Analysis*, 53, no. 3 (2009): 55; Luis Eduardo Guarnizo, "The Economics of Transnational Living," *International Migration Review*, 37, no. 3 (2003): 688-90.

⁷³ Terrence Lyons, "Conflict-Generated Diasporas and Transnational Politics in Ethiopia," *Conflict, Security & Development*, 7, no. 4 (2007): 529.

⁷⁴ Al-Ali, Black and Koser, "The Limits to 'Transnationalism'," 593; Zlatko Skrbis, "The Mobilized Croatian Diaspora: Its Role in Homeland Politics and War," in *Diasporas in conflict: Peace-Makers or Peace-Wreckers?* ed. Hazel Smith and Paul Stares (Tokyo: United Nations University, 2007) 219.

diaspora communities is essential for research into the development of those communities, in order to delineate the pre-emigration context of the Syrian businessmen chapter 2 will analyse the pre-2011 Syrian business community and chapter 3 will analyse the decision-making processes of their emigration after 2011.

Diasporas demonstrate their effects on their homelands and their destinations in three dimensions: political, economic, and social. Politically, when the diaspora's homeland is facing a certain kind of political dilemma or instability, the diaspora community in the host country may attempt to influence their domestic political issues through lobbying or even protesting in the host country. For instance, the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora demonstrated their political support for the opposition group (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) through a protest in Toronto while their homeland was in a state of civil war.⁷⁵ Economically, the diaspora communities show their ability in at least four ways: remittance, trade, investment, and skills transfer. It was estimated that the annual amount of the money transferred by the Afghan diaspora from Pakistan to Afghanistan between 1994 and 1995 was \$50 million through the Hawala system.⁷⁶ The Hawala system is an informal fund transfer system, it refers to money transfers outside of formal banking sector channels.⁷⁷ Many governments also understand the importance of diaspora to their countries. By ensuring they have a stable investment environment and providing them with specific favourable regulations, such governments expect diasporas to return investments or do business with their home

⁷⁵ Ishan Ashutosh, "Immigrant Protests in Toronto: Diaspora and Sri Lanka's Civil War," *Citizenship Studies*, 17, no. 2 (2013).

⁷⁶ Alessandro Monsutti, "Cooperation, Remittances, and Kinship among the Hazaras," *Iranian Studies*, 37, no. 2 (2004): 220.

⁷⁷ Mohammed El Qorchi, Samuel Munzele Maimbo, and John F. Wilson, *Informal Funds Transfer Systems: An Analysis of the Informal Hawala System* (Washington, D.C.: International Monetary Fund, 2003) 6.

countries. For example, the Ethiopian government has attempted to attract their overseas diaspora to participate in their homeland development since there are many Ethiopian diasporas who have succeeded as business entrepreneurs in North America.⁷⁸ After 2000, the Assad regime also applied a similar policy to attract the expatriate bourgeoisie to return to Syria.⁷⁹ Socially, diaspora communities can produce cultural exchanges between local societies and their homelands. This can be found in institutions that are established by diaspora communities to promote mutual understanding between the immigrants and local people.⁸⁰ Based on the previous understanding on economic, social, and political effects of the diaspora to their home and host countries, the thesis will examine how they engaged in these three specific fields to analyse how the Syrian business community has been transformed after relocating to the host countries.

2) Business diaspora

Businessmen travelling beyond national borders for business activities are not a new phenomenon. However, not until the later stages of the twentieth century did intellectuals start to investigate the topic of trade diaspora, in this case, in West Africa. As Curtin demonstrates “the term ‘trading diaspora’ originated with the anthropologist Abner Cohen, who defined it as ‘a nation of socially interdependent,

⁷⁸ Lyons, “Conflict-Generated Diasporas,” 537.

⁷⁹ Tina Zintl, “Syria’s Reforms under Bashar al-Asad: An Opportunity for Foreign-Educated Entrepreneurs to move into Decision-Making?” in *Business politics in the Middle East*, eds. Steffen Hertog, Giacomo Luciani, and Marc Valerie (London: Hurst, 2013) 172.

⁸⁰ Leila Mulloy, Questioning Spaces: Host Society Development and Diaspora - The Asociación Cultural de Ayuda Social Europa-Africa por el Progreso de Senegal, *Migration Studies Unit Working Papers* (Migration Studies Unit, London School of Economics and Political Science, 2010) 28, accessed March 10, 2017,

http://www.lse.ac.uk/government/research/resgroups/MSU/documents/workingPapers/WP_2010_08.pdf.

but spatially dispersed communities.”⁸¹ Curtin further elaborates that the trade diaspora is the commercial professionals who move to a town are important in the host countries (in cities but not fringe towns) and settle down for business activities.⁸² Cohen describes the business diaspora as “puzzling and inconvenient,” as businessmen can either become successful or pariahs to their host countries.⁸³ He concludes that without regard to these perplexities, the facts show that business activities can bring positive economic results to the diaspora homeland, to host societies, and to the diaspora itself. Furthermore, the study of business diaspora argues that expatriates donate, transfer, or invest in their home countries because of a psychological sentiment or philanthropy towards their motherland and their people.⁸⁴

In addition, they have the advantage of knowing their country’s networks and environments compared to other foreign investors – another reason which drives them to become involved in their homeland’s economic activities, since they are more competitive than others.⁸⁵

Finally, some diaspora groups even sponsor specific political groups in their original countries by transferring remittances. This transferral of remittances indicates how diasporas demonstrate their political identity through a transnational network, and is

⁸¹ Philip D. Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) 1-14. Regarding to Abner Cohen’s definition, see “Cultural Strategies in the Organization of Trading Diasporas,” in *The Development of Indigenous Trade and Markets*, ed. Claude Meillassoux (London: Oxford University Press, 1971) 266-281.

⁸² Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade*, 2.

⁸³ Cohen, *Global Diasporas*, 99.

⁸⁴ Gillespie et al., “Diaspora Interest in Homeland Investment,” *Journal of International Business Studies*, 30, no. 3 (1999): 625,626; Tjai Nielsen and Liesl Riddle, “Investing in Peace: The Motivational Dynamics of Diaspora Investment in Post-Conflict Economies,” *Journal of Business Ethics*, 89, no. 4 (2009): 437.

⁸⁵ Suren G. Dutia, “Diaspora Networks: A New Impetus to Drive Entrepreneurship,” *Innovations: Technology, Governance, Globalization*, 7, no. 1 (2012): 68.

considered to be protracting their homeland's instability.⁸⁶ The literature of business diaspora demonstrates that business diasporas not only have a strong economic stance, but in some cases, they also can play a role in their homeland's political affairs.

Nevertheless, the study of business diaspora mainly focuses on voluntary diaspora: when people move out of their home country to seek a better life. This interest-driven business diaspora has been broadly studied as with the cases of the Chinese or Lebanese diasporas.⁸⁷ Conflict-driven diasporas usually involve refugees or exiles who have less economic and social capital and so typically preclude being defined as business diaspora.⁸⁸ The cases of Afghani, Eritrean, Ethiopian, Iranian, Somali, Somalilander, and Sri Lankan diasporas are all war-generated diasporas in which their home country's domestic instability left them no choice but to leave their homeland.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Terrence Lyons, "Transnational Politics in Ethiopia: Diasporas and the 2005 Elections," *A Journal of Transnational Studies*, 15, no. 2 (2006): 266.

⁸⁷ Guita Hourani, "Lebanese Diaspora and Homeland Relations," *Paper prepared for the Conference Migration and Refugee Movements in the Middle East and North Africa, The Forced Migration & Refugee Studies Program* (The American University in Cairo, Egypt) October 23–25, 2007, accessed March 11, 2017, <http://schools.aucegypt.edu/GAPP/cmrs/Documents/Guitahourani.pdf>; Winnie Lem, "Mobilization and Disengagement: Chinese Migrant Entrepreneurs in Urban France," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 33, no. 33 (2010); Rosalie Tung and Henry Chung, "Diaspora and Trade Facilitation: The Case of Ethnic Chinese in Australia," *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*, 27, no.3 (2010); Nora Stel, *Diaspora versus Refugee: The Political Economy of Lebanese Entrepreneurship Regimes*, St. Louis: Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis (2013) accessed March 11, 2017, <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/docview/1698798808?accountid=10673>.

⁸⁸ Social capital refers to "capacity of individuals to command scarce resources by virtue of their membership in networks or broader social structures. ... The resources themselves are *not* social capital; the concept refers instead to the individual's *ability* to mobilize them on demand." Alejandro Portes, *The Economic Sociology of Immigration: Essays on Networks, Ethnicity and Entrepreneurship* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1995) 12.

⁸⁹ Alessandro Monsutti, *Afghan Transnational Networks: Looking beyond Repatriation*, Kabul: Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit (2006); Tricia M. Redeker Hepner, "Transnational Governance and the Centralization of State Power," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 31, no. 2 (2008); Terence Lyons, "The Ethiopian Diaspora and Homeland Conflict", in *Proceedings of the 16th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, ed. Svein Ege, Harald Aspen, Birhanu Teferra and Shiferaw Bekele (Trondheim: NTNU-trykk, 2009); Shahram Khosravi, "Displacement and Entrepreneurship: Iranian Small Businesses in Stockholm," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 25, no. 3 (1999); Yusuf Ahmed Nur, "Reviving the Somali Economy: Business Regulation and Development Opportunities Associated with Globalization," *Bildhaan: An International Journal of Somali Studies*, 7, no. 9 (2008); Ismail I. Ahmed, "Remittances and Their Economic Impact in Post-war Somaliland," *Disasters*, 24, no. 4 (2000); Sarah Wayland, "Ethnonationalist Networks and Transnational Opportunities: The Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora," *Review of International Studies*, 30, no. 3 (2004).

Even though this kind of diaspora is conflict-generated, they also have, to some extent, the characteristics of business diaspora such as economic abilities or entrepreneurships. The case of expatriate Syrian businessmen in this thesis is a case of war-induced migrants who were forced to leave their homeland due to conflict, but previously had been economically strong.

The literature on diaspora demonstrates the concepts and the impacts of a diaspora in the context of the original countries, and the literature on business diasporas shows the economic and political impacts of transnational communities on their original and home countries. In addition, the social background of expatriate groups plays a significant role in the future development of the diaspora. Voluntary business diasporas usually develop in a better economic situation than war-induced business diaspora. This is because the former groups are composed of business professionals who have knowledge and skills before they emigrate.

Reviewing the existing literature on business diaspora indicates that two issues need to be addressed. First, most literature merely emphasises the relationships between the diasporas and their home countries or the relationships between the diaspora and the host countries. However, the settlement and relocation process of emigration of Syrian businessmen to the host countries after 2011 will demonstrate that the relationships between the home and host governments also played an important role and needed to be considered as another factor which affects the process of the formation of a war-induced business diaspora. Second, even though massive population emigrations due to domestic conflicts have repeatedly happened in human history, there has been only one article written by Kenneth Omeje and John Mwangi

on the war-induced business diaspora: when Somali businessmen emigrated from war-torn Somalia to neighbouring Kenya. This study demonstrates not only the legal, political, and social impediments the Somalia business diaspora has encountered in Kenya, but it also demonstrates that the family/social networks of the Somali business diaspora have facilitated business success in Kenya.⁹⁰ As such, this research will distinguish the Syrian business class out from their compatriots who also fled the country because of war, and will focus exclusively on the businessmen to demonstrate how the economic elites migrated and settled through the disaster of their country and started their new lives in the alien lands. This strategy of research expects to pave a novel approach in the study of diasporas and provide a different way of thinking regarding the business diaspora, which is how a reconsideration of the importance of war-induced business diaspora can contribute to the on-going war.

c. Triadic conceptual framework

Based on the review of literature on Syrian business community and business diaspora, this study attempts to answer the question of how the Syrian business community has been transformed by looking into the development of the Syrian business community from a triadic conceptual framework. The triadic conceptual framework in this thesis refers to is the mutual interactions between three entities: the home country (Syria), the host countries (Turkey, Egypt, and Jordan), and the diaspora groups (the expatriate Syrian businessmen).

⁹⁰ Kenneth Omeje and John Mwangi, "Business Travails in the Diaspora: the Challenges and Resilience of Somali Refugee Business Community in Nairobi, Kenya," *Journal of Third World Studies*, 31, no. 1 (2014).

Previous studies of diaspora have a strong emphasis on the homeland dimension since the connections between the diaspora groups and their home countries, physically or sentimentally, were one of the main components which defined groups as a ‘diaspora.’⁹¹ In the case of the Syrian businessmen, not only did their relationships with the Syrian regime crucially decide the development of their economic activities in pre-revolution Syria as the previous literature has shown, but also after they resettled into the host countries, their activities were also homeland-orientated regardless of field, be it economic investment, philanthropic works, or political activities.

Furthermore, the host countries have a direct or indirect impact on the diasporans who resettled in their countries. This includes local regulations and the attitudes of the local societies towards the diasporans. Even though the former literature on diaspora did not pay much attention on how the relations between the host and home countries affect the formation of diaspora, under this framework, in addition to the analysis of the relations between the diaspora (Syrian businessmen) and their home country (Syria), and the relations between the diaspora (Syrian businessmen) and their host countries (Turkey, Egypt, and Jordan), the framework I propose in this research pays attention to the relationships between the home country (Syria) and the host countries (Turkey, Egypt, and Jordan), especially regarding the analysis of the relocation and resettlement process. Keeping this triadic conceptual framework in mind, I will look into the relationships between the Syrian businessmen and the Syrian regime from the 1970s to the present, the interactions between the expatriate Syrian businessmen and

⁹¹ Brubaker, “The ‘Diaspora’ Diaspora,” 5-7; Gorman and Kasbarian, “Introduction: Diasporas of the Modern Middle East,” 9.

the host countries after 2011, and the relations between the Syrian government and the host countries in which the Syrian businessmen have settled.

1.3 Methodology

Previous studies of the Syrian business community have shown the lack of sufficient fieldwork data on the Syrian businessmen, even during the more liberated Bashar al-Assad era, which was the main impediment in examining the complexities and subtleties of the Syrian business community as Haddad suggested.⁹² Address the lack of first-hand data, this research is based primarily on ethnographic work with expatriate Syrian businessmen in Turkey, Egypt, and Jordan. The reason for choosing Turkey, Egypt, and Jordan were because of the enormous number of the Syrian businessmen and the wealth that they brought with them into these three countries after the 2011 revolution. This means that the Syrian business communities which emerged in these three countries after 2011, to a certain extent, represent the meaningful dynamic of the Syrian business community in exile.

a. Definition of a businessman

The criteria of a businessman in this thesis is any Syrian who used to have investment activities in Syria and who was registered in the Syrian Chambers prior to the 2011 revolution, or any Syrian who relocated to host countries after 2011 and then embarked on economic investment and registered with the local Chambers, conformed to the selection criteria of ‘businessman.’ Among the 191 Syrian

⁹² Haddad, “Enduring legacies,” 30; Haddad, *Business Networks in Syria*, 197.

businessmen interviewed, only 7 were not in business prior to 2011 but later on established companies and registered in the host countries.

The reason for using the criteria is that many of the informants maintained a low-profile investment in their host countries, and it was difficult to judge the amount of capital of a company and the economic importance of the interviewees from its outward appearance. For instance, from interviewing a dessert shop Aleppo owner in Gaziantep, Turkey, I discovered that he used to deal in the gold trading. The amount of capital he used to deal in and own by himself, as well as his knowledge of the former Syrian business community and Syrian political economic environment was not negligible.

b. Methods: interviews, direct observations, and press surveys

The two ethnographic methods applied in this research were interviews and direct observations. The interviews took place face-to-face, were open-ended and semi-structured, and most interviews lasted between one to two hours, and some even lasted for three hours. Some informants were interviewed more than once. The language for the interview was standard Arabic since most businessmen were well educated and fluent in it, with the exception of three informants whose interviews were in English. Given that the development of the expatriate Syrian business community is a new phenomenon, the flexibility of the semi-structured interview attempts to uncover the ideas and knowledge that have thus far slipped under the radar. All the conversations during the interviews revolved around the issues of the pre-revolution social, economic, and political situations in Syria, as well as the

experiences of expatriation to resettlement in the host countries. There were four main focal points during the interviews: the former professional activities of the informants in Syria, including their experiences or opinions of the engagement in economic, charitable or political related activities within the country; the businessmen's reactions towards the 2011 civil uprising in Syria and the rationales behind their expatriation and the places of resettlements; the ways in which the businessmen interact with fellow Syrian businessmen and the local residents; and the reasons for and means of the professional activities they conducted or engaged in within the host countries. These points are essential for understanding what the situation in Syria was like before the revolution as well as for understanding their expatriation and resettlement in the host countries.

For a qualitative study, the sample size should be appropriate enough to be able to adequately answer the research question.⁹³ It is crucial to have enough data which can show variation and correlation of distinct groups and variables. The data collection in this research is a purposive sample, "[where] participants are selected according to predetermined criteria relevant to a particular research objective."⁹⁴ As Guest et al. further argues, purposive samples should be larger if the aim of the study is to "assess variation between distinct groups or correlation among variables."⁹⁵ In order to answer the question of how the Syrian business community has been transformed since 2011, a large amount of data is needed because there are several variables at play. Syrian businessmen who were from different cities in Syria and

⁹³ Margarete Sandelowski, "Focus on Qualitative Methods: Sample Size in Qualitative Research," *Research in Nursing & Health*, 18 (1995); Martin N. Marshall, "Sampling for Qualitative Research," *Family Practice*, 3, no. 6 (1996): 523.

⁹⁴ Greg Guest, Bunce A., and Johnson, L., "How Many Interviews Are Enough? An Experiment with Data Saturation and Variability," *Filed Methods*, 18, no. 1 (2006): 61.

⁹⁵ Ibid. 79.

worked in different business sectors moved to different countries and cities for various reasons and embarked on different activities and worked in various economic sectors and scales. Understanding the transformation of this heterogeneous context not only requires a scrutinised plan for the number of interviews to represent the transformation, but also requires multi-site fieldwork interviewing Syrian businessmen in different cities. Thus, the researcher conducted interviews across Turkey (Istanbul, Gaziantep, and Mersin), Egypt (Al-Obour, 6th of October, Cairo, and al-Badr), and Jordan (Amman). In Gaziantep and Istanbul there were 64 and 45 interviewees respectively since these two cities were the primary relocation choices. In Amman, Mersin, 6th of October and Cairo, there were 23, 20, 18, and 15 informants respectively. In Al-Obour and Badr, there were only 5 and 1 informants due to a limitation of time for field research in Egypt. In total, the researcher interviewed 191 informants. Although this number seems high, this was due to the need of understanding the different context and nature of the expatriate Syrian businessmen who moved to different cities and countries and conducted various activities.

In total, 191 Syrian businessmen were interviewed: 129 in Turkey, 39 in Egypt, and 23 in Jordan. All of the interviewees were from Sunni backgrounds, which made up 74% of the Syrian population prior to the 2011 revolution. Although there were extremely rich businessmen from the Alawite and Shiite sects, these groups are only 13% of the population, and only few of them became important businessmen, as previous studies have suggested.⁹⁶ This data cannot reflect the attitudes of the minority community in Syria, but since the majority of the businessmen are Sunni, it

⁹⁶ Thomas Pierret, "Syrian Arab Republic," in *The Government and Politics of the Middle East and North Africa*, ed. Mark Gasiorowski and Sean L. Yom (Boulder: Westview Press, 2017) 61.

can still make major contributions to the study of the Syrian business community. Additionally, three interviewees were Turkmen and two interviewees were Kurds, but the rest of the interviewees were all Arabs. The backgrounds of the interviewees do not oppose to the fact that more than 90% of the population in Syria is Arab.⁹⁷ Only three interviewees were female. This was due to the social culture in Syria, where, as a male researcher, it is not easy or proper to have access to or contact with females. Even during my stay at my male Syrian teacher's house in Istanbul for more than two months, I never saw or talked with his wife – except on one occasion when I was sick, but I still needed to close the door so she could leave the medicine without face-to-face conversation.

During one interview, two Turkey-based Aleppan businessmen (one worked in the plastic industry and trading, and the other one invested in restaurants and food services) informed me of the opportunity to participate with them in trade fairs with other Syrian businessmen in Turkey. As such, direct observation was also applied in this study since I personally attended four trade fairs in Turkey with Syrian businessmen to directly observe how they conducted their business, and how they interacted with each other during these trade fairs. Two strengths of direct observation, as Patton argues, are firstly that it can let the inquirer have a better understanding of the context of the people whom she/he is observing, and secondly it can capture important information which may “routinely escape awareness among the people in the setting.”⁹⁸ Based on its strengths, the direct observation method provides the researcher with the ability to observe and reveal how businessmen interact in groups

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2002) 262.

of more than a dozen businessmen. With the application of direct observation during interviews, the researcher realised the fear and unwillingness in the majority of businessmen to talk about political issues as an individual. The application of direct observation during trade fairs confirmed this fear and unwillingness. Moreover, its main contribution lies in understanding businessmen's social interactions in a group – the expatriate Syrian businessmen were afraid even to raise their hands to express their opinions or to write down their contact details at a gathering.

In addition to these two ethnographic methods, information was also collected from Arabic news websites. The reason for using up-to-date, first-hand news from official and semi-official Arabic websites is that it could supply neglected but significant facts which could not be gained from the academic literature or ethnographic work. It can also be used as a complementary source for ensuring the authenticity of the interview data.

c. Data collection

Pilot fieldwork

Pilot fieldwork was conducted for one month between mid-May and mid-June 2014 in the two Turkish cities of Istanbul and Gaziantep. Before departure, four informants had already promised to accept an interview. The first Damascene informant used to work in the furniture and plumbing trade in Syria but resettled in Istanbul after the revolution. The second Aleppan informant worked in the field of machine trading in Gaziantep. The third Aleppan informant established a newspaper company in

Gaziantep. The last Aleppo informant established a general trading company in Gaziantep.

The first informant was contacted through an introduction by my PhD supervisor Dr Thomas Pierret, and the latter three informants' names were found on different online news media while preparing for pilot fieldwork. By finding the Facebook accounts of these three businessmen and sending them private messages explaining the purpose of the research and the intentions interviewing them, it was possible to get in touch with these three businessmen after I went into the field (the fourth informant did not answer calls after I arrived in Turkey and thus his information is not included). By applying a snowballing approach, the three informants each introduced to me at least one or two other Syrian businessmen who were working in Turkey.

Nevertheless, in order to prevent interview data from being limited to the same social networks – which could have led this research into a bias – I also walked along the main business streets of Istanbul and Gaziantep looking for shops or companies with Arabic signs and asked the owners whether they were from Syria or not and if I could conduct interviews with them or not. In Gaziantep, a Turkish friend of the owner of the *madrasa* (religious school) where I was staying at introduced me to a Homs industrialist. As such, a total of 17 Syrian businessmen who were not introduced by the first three informants' networks were successfully located and interviewed.

In total, 31 Syrian businessmen were interviewed during the pilot fieldwork; one was from the 100 prominent businessmen list in Syria in 2009; three established factories in Turkey; two owned educational institutes; two worked in the newspaper business;

two had begun working in the politics; one had a textile workshop; the rest worked in various kinds of businesses including, restaurants, sweet shops, and clothes shops.⁹⁹ All these informants started their new careers in Turkey after 2011.

Three fieldwork trips: Turkey, Egypt, and Jordan

Upon returning from the pilot fieldwork, the collected data was organised and coded using Evernote software. The first five-month fieldwork trip to the Turkish cities of Istanbul, Gaziantep, and Mersin took place between the end of November 2014 and the end of April 2015. In total, 98 Syrian businessmen were interviewed. This was followed by another twenty-day fieldwork trip to the Amman, Jordan between the end of July and the end of August 2015, where 23 Syrian businessmen were interviewed. The final fieldwork trip took place in the Egyptian cities of Cairo, 6th of October, Al-Obour, and al-Badr for 2.5 months between mid-September and the end of November 2015 where 39 Syrian businessmen were interviewed.

In order to find new Syrian businessmen informants, four primary methods were applied:

- 1) browsing online news and finding important Syrian businessmen's names or the names of organisations, then sending them messages through Facebook or directly visiting their offices. For example in Egypt, one Aleppan textile tycoon who was also listed in the 100 prominent businessmen in Syria in 2009, was found through a Facebook group called "Rate AUC professors !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

⁹⁹ "abraz 100 rajul a'māl Surī," [100 prominent Syrian businessmen] *Aliqtisadi*, 2009, 2010.

Within this group, members were mostly students from the American University of Cairo.¹⁰⁰

- 2) walking and seeking on the streets for any Syrian companies or shops;
- 3) asking for official data from local semi-official organisations: in Turkey, this included visiting the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Istanbul, Mersin, and Gaziantep, as well as the Silk Road Development Agency (İPEKYOLU KALKINMA AJANSI) in Gaziantep.¹⁰¹ In Jordan, this was done by visiting the Investment Commission in Amman.¹⁰² The managers and administrators of these organisations also introduced other Syrian businessmen who they knew;
- 4) random encounters: One had been encountered during the pilot study fieldwork. He had been on the same flight from Istanbul to Gaziantep and an interview was arranged for the time period of the pilot fieldwork. .

d. The use of Evernote

During the interview, it was not possible to record what the informants said on any electronic device since most informants were nervous and cautious not to expose their identities. As such, during the interviews, all the conversations were written down (in the researcher's native language, Chinese) in notebooks.¹⁰³ After the interviews, the notes were transcribed onto a laptop computer using Evernote software. The use of

¹⁰⁰ Rate AUC Professors, accessed March 12, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/rate.auc.prof/?fref=ts>; “abraz 100 rajul a‘māl Surī.”

¹⁰¹ Silkroad Development Agency, 2013, accessed March 12, 2017, <http://www.ika.org.tr/english.html>.

¹⁰² Jordan Investment Commission, accessed March 12, 2017, <https://jic.gov.jo/portal>.

¹⁰³ The reason I wrote in Chinese was because that this is my mother language, and also, the informants could not understand what I was writing since some of them were trying to peep on my notes; and most importantly, by writing in Chinese, they have more confidence that ‘this guy is really from Taiwan.’

Evernote facilitates the researcher in storing, categorising, and retrieving interview data and further helps the data analysis.

The advantage of using the Evernote software for organising data was that it easily categorises the informants, this also help for the process of data analysis which will be explained later in following section. By using the tag function, it is possible to use more than one label in the informants' files. Eight main tags were used for this database: their time of departure from Syria; the Syrian city where they came from; the cities and countries which they relocated to after their departure; the activities they engage in in the host countries (economic, philanthropic, political, etc. or no activities); the political affiliations of the businessmen; whether or not they had business partnerships and whether or not they had dual nationalities, non-Arab ethnicities, (such as Kurd or Turkmen); and the specific non-economic organisations they were working on, if any.

In order to demonstrate the diverse nature of the informants, a brief description is relevant. This includes the time of emigration from Syria to the host country, the various economic scales of their economic investment, the different city origins in Syria, and political ideas towards the current Syrian conflict. This description will help to justify the strength of the data.

First, among the 191 Syrian businessmen, 7 had left Syria before 2011. Out of these 7 Syrian businessmen: 3 of them left after the Hama massacre, which was conducted by the Hafiz Assad regime in 1982, 1 started his investment in the United Arab Emirates

in 1988, and the other 3 left Syria to Turkey due to their business investments during the 2000s.

Second, another important feature was the economic scale of the Syrian businessmen. Among the 191 informants, 8 businessmen were listed on the top 100 prominent Syrian businessmen in 2009 and 2010. 4 of them were from Aleppo, 3 were from Damascus, and one of them was from Daraa. Out of these 7 Syrian business tycoons, 4 used to take the leading post in the Chamber of Industry in Damascus, the Chamber of Commerce in Aleppo, and the Chamber of Industry in Aleppo. One Aleppan plastic commercialist was believed to be on the top 10 Syrian commercialist list in his field by the other businessmen. The remain informants were on medium to small economic scales. This would include having a factory with more than 600 workers, commercial companies, and money transfer companies, to the smallest economic scale of owning of a restaurant with three workers.

Third, regarding the city where the informants came in Syria, the bold numbers in the table 2.1 belows demonstrate that 113 were from Aleppo, 52 of them were from Damascus, 12 were from Homs, 3 were from Idlib, 3 were from Hama, 2 were from Lattakia, 2 were from Qamishli, 2 were from Daraa, 1 was from al-Hasaka, and 1 was from al-Raqqah. More than half of the informants were from Aleppo because much more fieldwork time was spent in Turkey and Aleppo is closer to the Turkish border so it was a nearby destination over the border. And although there was massive violence in Damascus, it did not affect Damascene central neighbourhoods the way it did in Aleppo, which led to a higher number of Aleppans fleeing from Syria.

Fourth, regarding the informants' political ideas towards the Assad regime, the italic numbers in the table 1.1 shows that 110 were anti-regime, 68 were self-proclaimed neutral, and 13 of them were pro-regime. The pro-regime businessmen are the ones who claimed to side with the Assad regime and were completely opposed to the 2011 uprising. Contrary to the pro-regime businessmen, the anti-regime businessmen are the ones who claimed to support the revolution or praised the 2011 civil uprising, or sometimes had the three-star opposition flag in their companies' offices.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, their political ideas are not totally fixed, rather they might change due to the political environments in the host countries since the businessmen need to be aware of local political correctness. Additionally, they may maintain the fear of further retaliation from the Assad regime if they announce their oppositional stance. However, these two reasons, which may affect the assessment of the political ideas of Syrian businessmen in this research, may be less influential since the businessmen usually headed to host countries that had political positions which were similar to their own (this will be shown in chapter 4). Furthermore, many interviewees were introduced to the researcher by informants who had already been interviewed since they could vouch for the researcher's trustworthy background. As such, they would be less afraid of potential political retaliation from the regime even if they expressed their different political opinions. Moreover, the researcher has followed the ethical regulations regarding conducting interviews whereby the interviewees were all anonymised. This further reduced the possibility of Syrian businessmen being afraid of revealing their various political opinions. Finally, the businessmen whose political

¹⁰⁴ The three-star flag was being used as an independent flag for the struggle against the French rule for freedom in 1930s. The three red stars represents the three districts under the rule of the Ottoman – Damascus, Aleppo, and Deir Ezzor, Borzou Daragahi, "Syrian Rebels Raise A Flag From the Past," *Financial Times*, December 30, 2011, accessed March 30, 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/6c332676-32f4-11e1-8e0d-00144feabdc0?mhq5j=e2>.

statements could not fit into either of the two above mentioned categories were considered “self-claimed neutral”, because they were not willing to mention the 2011 events, they believed both sides of the conflict were incorrect, or they said politics were not part of their responsibilities as a businessman.

Host country	Turkey				Egypt				Jordan				
Origin/ politics		<i>Pr</i>	<i>An</i>	<i>Sn</i>		<i>Pr</i>	<i>An</i>	<i>Sn</i>		<i>Pr</i>	<i>An</i>	<i>Sn</i>	
Damascus	20	<i>1</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>6</i>	17	<i>2</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>5</i>	15	<i>1</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>5</i>	52
Aleppo	90	<i>1</i>	<i>55</i>	<i>34</i>	18	<i>7</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>5</i>	5		<i>1</i>	<i>4</i>	113
Homs	8		<i>6</i>	<i>2</i>	2			<i>2</i>	2		<i>2</i>		12
Idlib	2		<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	1			<i>1</i>					3
Hama	2		<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	1		<i>1</i>						3
Latakia	2		<i>2</i>										2
Qamishli	2	<i>1</i>		<i>1</i>									2
Daraa	1		<i>1</i>						1		<i>1</i>		2
al-Hasaka	1			<i>1</i>									1
al-Raqqa	1		<i>1</i>										1
	129	<i>3</i>	<i>80</i>	<i>46</i>	39	<i>9</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>13</i>	23	<i>1</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>9</i>	
<i>Pr</i> indicates pro-regime, <i>An</i> indicates anti-regime, and <i>Sn</i> indicates self-proclaimed neutral.												<i>Pr</i>	<i>13</i>
												<i>An</i>	<i>110</i>
												<i>Ap</i>	<i>68</i>

Table 1.1: Backgrounds of the informants

e. Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is used for analysing interview data. It allows the researcher to “use a wide variety of types of information in a systematic manner that increases their accuracy or sensitivity in understanding and interpreting observations about people, events, situations, and organizations.”¹⁰⁵ Thematic analysis is used for “identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data.”¹⁰⁶ The theme is defined as “a pattern found in the information that at a minimum describes and organises the possible observations and at a maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon.”¹⁰⁷

Since the question in this research is how the Syrian business community has been transformed and the main data of the research is based on interviews, the analysis was mainly inductive and the themes were data-driven.¹⁰⁸ The research also attempts to analyse the transformation with the triadic conceptual framework. To not neglect the theoretical perspectives, where themes can also develop from theoretical concepts, some themes were identified deductively based on the conceptual framework.¹⁰⁹ The process of thematic analysis has been outlined by Braun and Clarke as usually passing through the process of familiarisation of data, generating codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up the report.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ Richard E. Boyatzis, *Transforming Qualitative Information: Thematic Analysis and Code Development*. (London: Sage, 1998) 5.

¹⁰⁶ Virginia Braun, and Victoria Clarke, “Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology,” *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, no.2 (2006): 79.

¹⁰⁷ Boyatzis, 4.

¹⁰⁸ Braun and Clarke, 83-4.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid. 86-93.

After all the interview data were entered into Evernote, they were re-read three times and further coded through the tag function in Evernote, as mentioned above. Coding these data in different categories allowed the researcher to reflect on what the main themes were that related to the research question and fit into the triadic conceptual framework. Five themes have been developed both inductively and deductively. The inductive way of identifying themes produced three themes. The first was *the political reactions of businessmen after the 2011 revolution*. This information includes participation and non-participation during the 2011 revolution in Syria, the ways in which they participated, the wrath produced from witnessing killings of civilians by the regime, and the long-term wrath against the rule of Assad. The second was *the rationales of emigration*. The time of emigration, the reasons for leaving, and how the businessmen moved from Syria to the host countries were the codes for forming this theme. The third was *the various activities in host countries*. This theme derived from the different activities the businessmen were working on in the host countries, mainly in the fields of economics, philanthropy, and politics. The deductive way of the forming themes produced two other themes related to the triadic conceptual framework, emphasising the role of home and host countries. The first is *the influence of affective ties to the homeland on expatriate Syrian businessmen*, and the second is *the influences of the host countries on expatriate Syrian businessmen*. These five themes were discussed in chapter 3, 4, 5, and 6.

f. Ethical issues

Ethical issues are a significant factor for interviewing Syrian businessmen for several reasons. Since the Syrian conflict is still on-going and the Syrian businessmen may

have relatives or property in Syria, they do not want to get in trouble in the future after they return to Syria. If they were to say something which may not be in the favour of the Assad regime and if the regime were stay in power, their personal safeties may be into serious danger. They are not living in their own country, but rather were forced to resettle in the host countries. They were not used to interviews, and more importantly, they were afraid of whether the interviewer was sent from the Assad regime to monitor them. This was a serious issue during fieldwork which I encountered frequently. Many times Syrian businessmen considered me to be a ‘Syrian *mukhabarat*.’ In some cases, even showing them my Taiwanese passport was not evidence enough. As such, confidentiality was of utmost importance. During the fieldwork, it was essential to always be honest and have no preservations regarding institutional affiliations and the research topic while during interviews with the informants. Each informant was asked to give oral consent to use their names – all but four of the 191 informants requested to remain anonymous. It was not possible to ask the interviewees to formally sign their names as that would risk exposing them, so no written consents were taken during interviews. As such, the informants’ names are being withheld here and only descriptions of where they are from, what kind of economic activities they were doing, the places of their relocation, and the date of interview are used, for instance, *Aleppan restaurateur no1, personal interview, Gaziantep, May 22, 2014*. Different interviewees from the same city will be given a sequence number followed by the order in which they appear in this research.

1.4 Limitations of the study

This study has two limitations in terms of its materials. First, even though Lebanon and the UAE are the two other host countries which received many Syrian businessmen after 2011, due to time restraints of the PhD study and the difficulty of receiving visas for entering these two countries, the researcher could not conduct research with businessmen who relocated there. The absence of fieldwork in Lebanon and the UAE with the Syrian businessmen limited the possibility of reflecting on and analysing the pre-2011 and post-2011 situations and considerations of the Lebanon and UAE based Syrian businessmen. Furthermore, due to the lack of Turkish language ability of the researcher and the limited fieldwork time in Egypt and Jordan, this research did not cover the viewpoints of the people from the host countries towards the Syrian businessmen.

1.5 Structure of the thesis

This thesis contains seven chapters. Chapter 1 is the introductory chapter which delineates the context of the study, the main questions and importance of this study, and its limitation. It also reviews the significant literature in the fields of the Syrian business community and the business diaspora, and proposes the conceptual framework developed from previous literature, and the discussion of the methods and empirical data used in this thesis.

Chapter 2 analyses the pre-2011 Syrian business community. It sketches the basis of how the Syrian business community used to be in the pre-2011 revolution era by investigating the pre-2011 political-economic environment in Syria and how this context affected the Syrian business community.

Chapter 3 explores the period between the eruption of revolution to the decisions of expatriation on the part of the businessmen. The chapter analyses the rationales behind the reactions of the Syrian business community towards the unprecedented civil uprising inside the country. It also discusses the reasons for expatriation of the Syrian businessmen from Syria.

Chapter 4 investigates the relocation and settlement process of the Syrian businessmen in the host countries. The chapter first analyses the rationales for why Syrian businessmen selected places for relocation. The chapter then differentiates the challenges that the Syrian businessmen have encountered at the beginning of their settlement process. Finally, it demonstrates the shifting of the expectation of a quick return to Syria to a realisation that they would be staying long term in the host countries.

Chapters 5 and 6 focus on the activities conducted by the expatriate Syrian businessmen in the host countries after their settlements. Chapter 5 discusses the economic activities of the expatriate Syrian businessmen. Chapter 6 investigates the philanthropic works and political participations of the expatriate Syrian businessmen in the host countries.

Chapter 7 concludes and summarises how the Syrian business community has been transformed into a war-induced business diaspora by the 2011 revolution, and how this transformation has made impact on expatriate Syrian business networks from a fragmented networks to a more cooperative and transnationalised networks. Based on

the analysis from the previous chapters, I will argue that those expatriate Syrian business communities are developing from temporarily forced migrants into a long-term war-induced business diaspora, and the pre-2011 Syrian business networks have been transformed from fragmented networks to more cooperate and transnationalised networks. This is due mainly to the prolongation of the conflict in Syria and a homeland-orientation of expatriate Syrian businessmen during life in exile, which can be observed from their economic, philanthropic, and political activities in the host countries.

This analysis of the transformation of Syrian business community by the 2011 revolution into a long-term business diaspora indicates five findings. The first two findings are related to studies on the Syrian business community and the other three findings address studies on migration and diaspora. First, the pre-2011 Syrian business networks were fragmented due to the previous political economic environment inside Syria. Second, the long-term, non-politicised Syrian business community divided into different political groups throughout the revolution, and some Syrian businessmen have actively supported and participated in the revolution, further wavering in the pre-revolution symbiotic state-business relationship. Third, although personal networks have been argued to be an important factor in migrants' or diasporans' settlement and relocation, for the business diaspora, the economic consideration is a more important factor. Fourth, the political relations between the host and home governments are important, in addition to their impact during the relocation and settlement process. Fifth, the activities of expatriate Syrian businessmen in the host countries indicate that their specific ways of thinking and acting pre-emigration migrated with them.

Chapter 2 The Pre-Revolution Syrian Business Community: Fragmented Business Networks

The [Assad] government used to be very cruel to its own people and was corrupt. In every country there are mafias, and in Syria, the government is the mafia.

- An Aleppo real estate investor no4¹¹¹

The above quote reflects, to a certain extent, the idea that many businessmen in Syria had of the regime before the revolution. But why did the businessmen have this idea? And how did this idea affect their previous behaviour inside Syria? Since the historical context of the diaspora has had an impact on their later development in the host countries, a delineation of context can facilitate the analysis of the transformation.¹¹² In order to delineate this historical context, the aim of this chapter is to examine the Syrian business community in the pre-2011 revolution period, and will address three main issues: the structure of the Syrian business community in the pre-2011 revolution era; the impact that former features of Syrian political-economic environment had on the business community; and the former nature of Syrian business networks and the influences of the networks on the ways in which Syrian businessmen interact with each other and conduct economic, political and philanthropic activities. And the following chapter will analyse how they reacted towards the 2011 revolution and their decisions emigrate.

¹¹¹ Aleppo real estate investor no4, personal interview, Gaziantep, December 25 2014.

¹¹² Al-Ali, Black and Koser, "The Limits to 'Transnationalism'," 593; Skrbis, "The Mobilized Croatian Diaspora," 219.

First, a categorisation of the Syrian business community will be provided based on political ties with the Syrian regime. This includes: ruling family businessmen, crony businessmen, strategic businessmen, and independent businessmen. Second, it will be argued that corruption combined with nepotism, the injustice accompanying state intervention in the businessmen's activities, and the lack of efficiency and lack of transparency in judicial and banking systems with which the Syrian businessmen needed to interact were the three main factors that forced the businessmen to work cautiously and made them suspicious of others. Third, it will be demonstrated that the Syrian businessmen developed among themselves their own specific ways to compensate for the lack of trust in state institutions and that they actively engaged in business investment and philanthropic activities, as well as participating to a certain extent cautiously and suspiciously in domestic politics. The research findings in this chapter will demonstrate that Syrian business networks were fragmented prior to 2011 due to the political-economic environment in Syria, and were characterised by a large number of small networks that did not trust each other, but inside which, had a number of small networks that benefited from a great level of trust.

2.1 The structure of Syrian business community: pre-1963 to post-2000

We lie to ourselves that he [Bashar] is good, that he is different from his father [Hafiz]. But, snake only delivers snake.

- An Aleppan food industrialist no2¹¹³

The Syrian business community was constituted of two main groups before the reign

¹¹³ Aleppan food industrialist no2, personal interview, Gaziantep, December 29, 2014.

of the Ba'th party in Syria in 1963: the extremely rich bourgeoisie and the traditional petty bourgeoisie. The extremely rich bourgeoisie businessmen's roots can be traced back to the late Ottoman Empire and to the French Mandate period when those bourgeoisie who cooperated with the French had a better chance of enhancing their wealth under the private latifundia system; their economic position was later sustained after the Syrian independence in 1946.¹¹⁴ Examples of Syrian bourgeoisie families before 1965 include the al-Dibs, the al-Ba'labakī, the Qallā', the Haykal, the Shallāh, the Ḥaydarī, the 'Abd al-Qādir al-Shabāriq, the al-Ḥājj al-Ṣā'im al-Dahr, the Wabhī al-Ḥarīrī, and the al-Mudarris.¹¹⁵

During the 1961 United Arab Republic (UAR) political union between Syria and Egypt and under the nationalisation of president Gamal Abdu al-Nasser, these extremely rich bourgeoisie families experienced the first economic shock as a consequence of the government's land reform.¹¹⁶ One consequence was the devastation of the extremely rich bourgeoisies' capital, which made these businessmen lose large parts of their fortunes. For example, al-Ḥājj al-Ṣā'im al-Dahr had no more than \$10,000 and 50,000 Syrian lira even though he used to employ 400 workers in his factories and was the founding member and the first president of the Chamber of Industry in Aleppo in 1935.¹¹⁷ The bourgeoisie used to manipulate the Syrian economy and enjoy political privileges before 1961, however, some extremely rich bourgeoisie decided to leave Syria after the first wave of nationalisation in 1961.

¹¹⁴ Ziad Keilany, "Land Reform in Syria," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 16, no.3 (1980): 209.

¹¹⁵ Aleppan food industrialist no3, personal interview, Gaziantep, February 10, 2015.

¹¹⁶ Perthes, "A Look at Syria's Upper Class," 31-3.

¹¹⁷ "qiṣṣa ma'mal al-Ḥājj Sāmī Ṣā'im al-Dahr wa ta'mīm Jamāl 'Abd al-Nāṣir," [The story of al-Ḥājj Sāmī Ṣā'im al-Dahr's factory and Jamāl 'Abd al-Nāṣir's nationalisation] *Aksalser*, June 20, 2010, accessed March 13, 2017, http://www.aksalser.com/?page=view_articles&id=8cc62dc9de9e11fd36341360a74aa6fe.

When the Ba'th party came into power in 1963, they applied a series of nationalisation, which nationalised limited and joint-stock companies by the government and transformed or dissolved them into smaller establishments.¹¹⁸ During this period, a company whose owners held capital at a value of more than one million Syrian lira (equal to \$250,000 at that time) would be subject to nationalization.¹¹⁹ Data suggests that another 120 industrial establishments were completely or partially nationalised in January 1965, and that after the February 1966 coup, 95% of industrial investments in Syria were under the control of the state.¹²⁰ Furthermore, between 1963 and 1966, approximately 200,000 Syrians left Syria as a result of the nationalisations.¹²¹ Essentially, the group of extremely rich bourgeoisie businessmen in Syria withered due to the economic policies from the ruling powers and their exodus to other countries.

In addition to the extremely rich bourgeoisie, the traditional petty bourgeoisie was the other important, but less discussed business group. The traditional petty bourgeoisie were the people who were neither from the working class nor from the capitalist primary bourgeoisie. They were self-employed artisans or shopkeepers.¹²² This group of businessmen frequently conducted strikes during the French Mandate period, but not to an extent which would threaten French authority.¹²³ From the data provided by

¹¹⁸ Perthes, *The Political Economy*, 38.

¹¹⁹ "mādhā fa'al ḥizb al-Ba'th bi-l-iqtisād al-sūri," [What the Ba'th Party did to the Syrian economy?] *Eqtsad*, April 11, 2015, accessed March 13, 2017, <http://www.eqtsad.net/read/10009>.

¹²⁰ Perthes, *The Political Economy*, 38, 40.

¹²¹ Ziad Keilany, "Socialism and Economic Change in Syria," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 9, no. 1 (1973): 71.

¹²² Elisabeth Longuenesse, "The Class Nature of the State in Syria," *MERIP Report*, no. 77 (1979): 3,4.

¹²³ Philip S. Khoury, "Syrian Urban Politics in Transition: The Quarters of Damascus during the French Mandate," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 16, no. 4 (1984): 512,517,519, 525.

Longuenesse, the number of people in this group in 1960 was estimated to be 110,900, which the bourgeoisie class was 59,390.¹²⁴ Since their economic capital was modest, this group avoided the consequences of nationalisation and has sustained itself, with ups and downs, until today.

When Hafiz al-Assad came into power in 1970, he acknowledged the lack of economic and social support from the Syrian society, which was a critical weakness that he needed to improve. By expanding ruling power from the military to other sectors, the Syrian regime went through what Hinnebusch calls the ‘embourgeoisment.’ This is a process when a group of businessmen come onto the scene through personal and familial ties with the central power, and, as a result become rich and dominate the economic sector. Examples in Syria include Muḥammad Makhlūf, who was the brother-in-law of Hafiz al-Assad and the father of Rāmī Makhlūf, and Rifʿat al-Asad who was Hafiz al-Assad’s brother and the former vice-president of Syria.¹²⁵ The ruling power of Syria allied with the Damascene businessmen and other middle and upper-middle class businessmen. Sadiq al-Azm even described the development of the new class as a “merchant-military complex,” mainly between the Alawites and Damascenes, as stated by Seal.¹²⁶ Many *nouveau riche* started their new careers as ‘businessmen’ in Syria, through their personal close ties with the ruling power. Meanwhile, most traditional petty bourgeoisie continued to

¹²⁴ Longuenesse, “The Class Nature of the State in Syria,” 4.

¹²⁵ Hinnebusch, *Syria: Revolution from Above*, 8,9; Bassām Jaʿāra, “min imbarātūr al-tabgh Muḥammad Makhlūf ilā shabīḥat al-Asad,” [From the tobacco emperor Muḥammad Makhlūf to al-Assad’s shabīyḥa] *The Huffington Post*, November 25, 2015, accessed April 10, 2017, http://www.huffpostarabi.com/bassam-jeaara/-_2691_b_8645512.html; Former Syrian Vice-President Rifʿat Al-Assad: My Nephew Bashar Must Step Down; He Is Not Qualified to Bear Responsibility, *The Middle East Media Research Institute*, December 4, 2011, accessed April 05, 2017, <https://www.memri.org/reports/former-syrian-vice-president-rifat-al-assad-my-nephew-bashar-must-step-down-he-not-qualified>.

¹²⁶ Patrick Seal, *Asad: The Struggle for the Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 456.

grow their businesses, as long as they did not threaten the regime's political power.

During the 1980s, Syria experienced a foreign exchange crisis, which caused the regime to implement an economic *infitah* to counter this. The logic of the Syrian regime's economic opening/ economic reform was considered 'selective liberalization.'¹²⁷ The economic opening was a calculation of political and economic interest to the regime.¹²⁸ The businessmen who had familial ties with the Assad regime were still strong and were still dominating the economic sector when a law from the joint public-private sector was passed which attempted to attract economic input from the private sector into the Syrian market.¹²⁹ Other businessmen who had personal ties with the Assad regime continued to benefit from the regime's policies, while other family members of the regime's crony figures became business tycoons, such as Firās Ṭallās – whose father was Muṣṭafā Ṭallās, a comrade of Hafiz's and the Minister of Defence in Syria between 1972 and 2004.¹³⁰ In 1990, capital investments of the private sectors overpassed the public sector for the first time since 1963.¹³¹ This may be due to the weak performance of the public sector during fiscal crisis of the 1980s, but it also indicates that not only had the regime and their crony businessmen benefited from the 1980s' *infitah*, but that many other Syrian businessmen's economic investments had improved. The last prominent change in Hafiz's economic policy was issuing Law No.10 in 1991. The Syrian economy experienced a general improvement, but after the issuance of this law, the economic

¹²⁷ Stephen Heydemann, "The Political Logic of Economic Rationality: Selective Stabilization in Syria," in *The Politics of Economic Reform in the Middle East*, ed. Henri J. Barkey (New York: St Martin's Press, 1992).

¹²⁸ Hinnebusch, "Syria: The Politics of Economic Liberalisation," 254-5.

¹²⁹ Perthes, *The Political Economy*, 55.

¹³⁰ "Profile: Mustafa Tlas," *BBC*, September 22, 2003, accessed March 13, 2017, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3127058.stm.

¹³¹ Hinnebusch, *Syria: Revolution from Above*, 130.

infitah in Syria slowed down.¹³²

When Bashar came to power in 2000, he attempted to encourage the development of private sectors in Syria through the establishment of representative associations and allowing private sector representatives join the decision making process regarding economic policies and reforms of previous economic laws and the establishment of banks inside the country, as Abboud suggested.¹³³ However, regarding the business community in Syria, there were no obvious changes after 2000, but rather the structure of the business community remained almost the same as during the 1990s, with the exception of a handful regime and crony businessmen. Examples of additional crony businessmen include Rāmī Makhlūf, mentioned previously, Muḥammad Ḥamshū, who had been ‘poor’ in the late 1990s but became extremely rich and gained economic positions in Syria through his personal ties with the regime, and Nawār Sukkar, who owns the NASCO Group. The NASCO Group invests in providing oilfield services to petroleum companies operating, and services and equipment to the medical sector in Syria, as well as agricultural services, irrigation systems and contracting, and oil exhibitions in the Middle East.¹³⁴ Also, in the first five years of Bashar al-Assad’s rule, the state–businessmen relationships did not undergo many changes.¹³⁵ In the Tenth Regional Conference of the Ba’th Party in 2005, the decision was made to adopt a social market economy in Syria.¹³⁶ One

¹³² Perthes, *Syria under Bashar al-Asad*, 28.

¹³³ Samer Abboud, “The Political Economy of Marketization in Syria” (PhD’s thesis, University of Exeter, 2009) 78-80.

¹³⁴ “Muḥammad Ḥamshū.” [Muḥammad Ḥamshū] *WikiSuriya*, accessed April 04, 2016, <http://wikisuriya.org/index.php?title=%D9%85%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%AF%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%B4%D9%88>; the NASCO Group, accessed April 11, 2017, <http://thenascogroup.com/nasco.htm>.

¹³⁵ Haddad, *Business Networks in Syria*, 91.

¹³⁶ Abboud, “The Political Economy of Marketization in Syria”; Seifan, “The Road to Economic Reform in Syria,” 16.

element of a social market economy is the privatisation of the public sector.¹³⁷ But this slogan of social market economy was no more than propaganda, as Donati suggests, that the social market economy “conveys the impression of openness but in reality penalizes reformist aspirations that are viewed as a threat by the ruling coalition.”¹³⁸ Donati further argues, the Bashar regime attempted to cultivate a new circle of businessmen to counterweight former allies, especially the directors of the Chambers of Commerce.¹³⁹

Categorisation of the Syria Business Community

I used to have a business partner from the regime, this was common in Syria. If someone tells you that he did not have a business partner from the government, then he must be a liar.

- An Aleppo automobile parts and real estate investor no5¹⁴⁰

As suggested in the previous chapter on topic of the categorisation of Syrian businessmen, former categorisations of Syrian businessmen deserve a revision due to the lack of recognition of the majority upper middle class businessmen, the oversimplified categorisation criteria by business sectors, and the prolongation of the Syrian conflict.

¹³⁷ John Marangos, “A Political Economy Approach to the Neoclassical Gradualist Model of Transition,” *Journal of Economic Surveys*, 19, no. 2 (2005): 272-75.

¹³⁸ Caroline Donati, “The Economics of Authoritarian Upgrading in Syria: Liberalization and the Reconfiguration of Economic Networks,” in *Middle East Authoritarianisms: Governance, Contestation, and Regime Resilience in Syria and Iran*, ed. Steven Heydemann and Reinoud Leenders (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014) 37.

¹³⁹ Ibid. 42.

¹⁴⁰ Aleppo automobile parts and real estate investor no5, personal interview, Mersin, February 1, 2015.

Previous studies demonstrate that the top Syrian businessmen's activities were strongly affected by the regime. As Haddad suggests, the fortunes of the "most powerful segment of the new economic elite" are derived from their political positionality.¹⁴¹ In addition to the new economic elite, it was not only this specific group which was affected by the regime, but that the remaining upper-middle, medium and small economic scale businessmen could not have achieved decent business without interacting with the regime.

The situation of businessmen might not have been as extreme as the quote above suggests – that no one could work without a partner from the regime – however, no informants expressed the belief that any businessmen was immune from the regime's influences or could work without the regime's permission. Notwithstanding, businessmen had various forms of interactions with the regime and different degrees of dependency on the regime. These relationships would later decide the results of the businessmen's activities and impact their behaviour. As such, the relationship between the regime and its business community was the most critical factor that determined a businessman's later developments, regardless of his economic or social stance. Thus, I will categorise the Syrian businessmen in the pre-2011 era into four groups based on their relationships with the Assad regime: ruling family, crony businessmen, strategic businessmen, and independent businessmen. Essentially, a Syrian businessman's destiny was non-separable from his relationship with the regime, regardless of other factors such as their economic scales or social status.

¹⁴¹ Haddad, *Business Networks in Syria*, 64.

The ruling family businessmen

The ruling family businessmen were considered the richest and wealthiest businessmen in pre-revolution Syria. Their economic position and wealth were absolutely attributed to their social origins, which, can be seen as an extension of the Syrian regime after the 1970 Ba’th rules. This group of businessmen were all directly related to the Assad clan and personally had familial ties with Assad family members. Furthermore, they tended to be either Alawite or Shia. This group of businessmen included Muḥammad Makhlūf;¹⁴² Rāmī Makhlūf;¹⁴³ Muḥammad Ḥamshū;¹⁴⁴ Ṭarīf al-Akhras (the cousin of Bashar al-Assad’s wife, Asmā’ al-Akhras and the second biggest Syrian exporter);¹⁴⁵ and Ghassān al-Mihna and Nizār As‘ad (al-Mihna is Rāmī Makhlūf’s maternal uncle and al-Mihna and As‘ad are maternal cousins, as well as As‘ad’s mother being friends with Hafīz al-Assad’s wife). Al-Mihna and As‘ad are also business partners in an oil company in Syria.¹⁴⁶

If there was ever a chance to make huge profits, the businessmen in this group would never hesitate to use their nepotistic ties or their authority to exploit other businessmen. For example, Rāmī Makhlūf exploited his personal ties with the intelligence service after forcing his Egyptian business partner to leave Syria and

¹⁴² See page 69.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ See page 71.

¹⁴⁵ “al-būrjuwāzī al-jadīda fī Sūrīyā,” [The new bourgeoisie in Syria] *Asharqalarabi*, June 5, 2010, accessed March 13, 2016, http://www.asharqalarabi.org.uk/markaz/m_abhath-06-06-10-1.htm; “Ṭarīf al-Akhras,” [Ṭariyf al-Akhras], *aliqtisadi*, accessed April 12, 2017, <https://ae.aliqtisadi.com/%D8%B4%D8%AE%D8%B5%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AA/%D8%B7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%81-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%AE%D8%B1%D8%B3/>.

¹⁴⁶ “inbā’ ‘an inshiqāq al-iqtisādī al-akbar ba‘ad Rāmī Makhlūf wa-sharīk khālu-hu,” [News of the biggest economic split after Rāmī Makhlūf and his uncle's partner] *All4Syria*, September 05, 2012, accessed April 12, 2017, <http://www.all4syria.info/Archive/53320>.

surrender his share of the profitable SyriaTel cell phone company.¹⁴⁷ Due to their illegal and nepotistic approaches of capital seeking, the majority of the businessmen in Syria despised the businessmen in this group. “They are not businessmen, they are thieves and robbers. They know nothing about running a business, rather they use their acquaintances from the regime to exploit others,” stated one Aleppo machines trading businessmen no6.¹⁴⁸

Since their wealth came exclusively as a consequence of the regime’s blessing, they held unwavering allegiance to the regime and actively took part in various organisations and business associations. Some important ruling family businessmen’s and crony businessmen’s personal relationships with the Assad regime are illustrated in Graph 2.1 below. The businessmen in this group were similar to what previous studies called the ‘state bourgeoisie.’ However, in addition to the ruling family businessmen, I further divide the former category of ‘state bourgeoisie’ into another group, the crony businessmen.

Crony Businessmen

The major distinction between the ruling family businessmen and the crony businessmen is that the crony businessmen did not have familial ties with regime figures and were not necessarily from an Alawite social origin. It was this difference that brought the crony businessmen close to the regime, but not quite into the regime. The reason that this group can be considered ‘cronies’ is because their characteristics conform to the definition of ‘crony capitalism.’ The people who are close to political

¹⁴⁷ Borshchevskaya, “Sponsored Corruption,” 46.

¹⁴⁸ Aleppo machines trading businessmen no6, personal interview, Gaziantep, December 13, 2014.

authorities can gain huge economic interest from favours provided by the political authorities. One common form is “to award a favored economic group with an official or quasi-official monopoly, thus allowing that group to earn monopoly rents.”¹⁴⁹

The main characteristic of this group is that, their ties with the regime provided them with a quasi-monopolistic or monopolistic stance in the market. Their wealth came primarily from direct personal relationships with members of the ruling family or “a tradition of informal business deals with military and intelligence officers,” to gain privileged access to certain sectors and economic fields in the form of a quasi-monopoly with less competition but high profits.¹⁵⁰ Their origins are a result of four decades of the Assad family in political power.¹⁵¹ Since their emergence was mainly attributed to the regime’s consideration of political stability, the Assad family has provided different businessmen in various periods with ‘privileges’ once the regime needed allies in the economic sectors.

The nature of the relationship between the crony businessmen and the regime can be illustrated as an alliance, personal patronage from the regime, indirect patronage from the regime, and the children of the comrades.¹⁵² The emergence of the crony businessmen through alliance with the regime can be traced back to Hafiz al-Assad’s seizing power in 1970, when the lack of a social and economic base made Hafiz apply the so-called “merchant-military complex”.¹⁵³ For example, when Hafiz came to

¹⁴⁹ Stephen Haber, *Crony capitalism and economic growth in Latin America: Theory and evidence*, (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2002) xii.

¹⁵⁰ Perthes, “The Syrian Private Industrial”; Matar

¹⁵¹ Ivan Briscoe, Floor Janssen, and Rosan Smits, *Stability and Economic Recovery after Assad: Key Steps for Syria’s Post-Conflict Transition*, *Clingendael: Netherlands Institute of International Relations* (2012) 9.

¹⁵² see Graph 2.1.

¹⁵³ Seal, *Asad: The Struggle for the Middle East*, 456.

power, he decided to ally himself with particularly reputable and wealthy, old Damascene families such as the Shallāh family, who was from the old Damascene bourgeois class which had remained after the series of nationalization changes in the 1960s.¹⁵⁴

For the patronage groups of crony businessmen, their relationships with the regime first developed due to the economic situation of the 1970s and 1980s, when Hafiz selectively supported and cultivated a few medium-sized business families in an attempt to boost the Syrian economy. For instance, during the 1970 to the late 80s, Uthman al-‘Aidi, Sa’ib Nahhas, and ‘Abdul-Rahman al-‘Attar rose to the top, became extremely wealthy and were considered the ‘troika’ in Syria.¹⁵⁵ This group of businessmen was not as economically strong as the old bourgeoisie before Hafiz provided them with economic privileges. In the 1990s, when the regime issued Law No. 10 aiming to increase its economic opening, most businessmen who benefited from the policy were in the same category as those who could access to the quasi-monopolistic market.¹⁵⁶ Furthermore, other businessmen who had personal acquaintances with the Assad family also got promoted, such as Hāshim al-Aqqād who was a friend of Basel al-Assad and gained personal support from Māhir al-Asad in the 1990s.¹⁵⁷

Finally, once the children of the cronies grew up, some of them also participated in the business sector. With the blessing of their fathers’ political networks, they started

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. 325, 326.

¹⁵⁵ Haddad, *Business Networks in Syria*, 74.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. 130, 131.

¹⁵⁷ “wa-‘alā ra’sihā “al-sha‘ār,”” [First and foremost, “Logo”], *Zamanalwsl*, May 31, 2015, accessed March 13, 2017, <https://www.zamanalwsl.net/news/61218.html>.

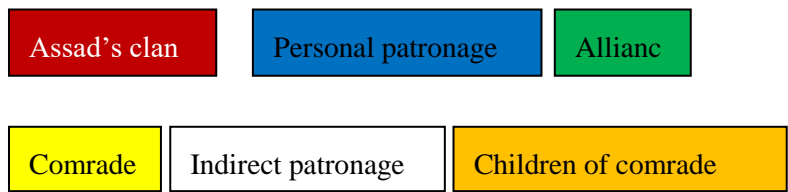
their businesses in a stronger position of political, social, and economic capital. The best-known figure from this group is Firās Ṭallās, whose father was the Minister of Defence in Syria, Muṣṭafā Ṭallās. As a child of comrades, Firās became the second richest businessman in Syria after Rāmī Makhlūf and was known as the ‘sugar king’.¹⁵⁸ Since the wealth of crony businessmen originated with the regime, their political attitudes were also linked to the regime.

Even though the nature of their alliance was strong, it was not as strong as that between the ruling family businessmen and the regime. Although Bashar al-Assad claimed to fight corruption in the 2000s, he did not take on the crony capitalists. If it ever came to a critical point, the crony businessmen could choose to give up their alliance with the regime, or vice versa.¹⁵⁹ For example, Firās Ṭallās left Syria during the revolution, and ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-‘Aṭṭār and Ṣā’ib Naḥās both faced the confiscation of their capital and were prohibited from leaving the country during the revolution in February and August 2015 respectively.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ Briscoe, *Stability and Economic Recovery*, 45.

¹⁵⁹ Raymond Hinnebusch, “Globalization and Generational Change: Syrian Foreign Policy between Regional Conflict and European Partnership,” *The Review of International Affairs*, 3, no.2 (2003): 197.

¹⁶⁰ Russell Chapman, “Interview with Firas Tlass the Son of Syrian Ex Defense Minister Mustafa Tlass,” November 11, 2013, accessed March 13, 2017, <https://russellchapman.wordpress.com/2013/11/11/interview-with-firas-tlass/>; “al-ḥajz al-tanfīdhī ‘alā al-amwāl al-manqūla wa ghayr al-manqūla li- “Ṣā’ib Naḥās” wa waladay-hi,” [Executive seizure of movable and immovable property of “Ṣā’ib Naḥās” and his two sons], *All4syria*, August 17, 2015, accessed March 13, 2017, <http://www.all4syria.info/Archive/242577>; “ḥajz i’tiyāṭi wa man‘ safar bi-ḥaqq al-duktūr ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-‘Aṭṭār,” [Reserved seizure and travel ban against Dr. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-‘Aṭṭār], *Shaamtimes*, February 6, 2015, accessed March 13, 2017, <http://www.shaamtimes.net/news-detailz.php?id=23296>.



1. Ruling family businessmen: (1) Assad's clan; (2) Comrades
2. Crony businessmen: (1) Personal patronage; (2) Indirect patronage; (3) Children of comrades; (4) Alliance

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Strategic Businessmen

The strategic businessmen were primarily from the Sunni backgrounds. Some of them their families can be traced back to the pre-Ba'th era since some had started family businesses in the 1970s and 1980s from a modest social stratum. As mentioned previously, the economic *infītah* in Syria not only benefitted the ruling family businessmen and crony businessmen, but also the merchant upper middle class and most strategic businessmen.¹⁶¹ The reason this group of businessmen is called 'strategic' is because of the nature of their interactions with the regime, the way they conducted their business activities, and their attitudes regarding social or political participation. Their interactions with the regime were exclusively interest-driven, and they cooperated with the regime for the sake of gaining access to better business facilities. However, if they were not happy with the regime, they did not let it show. Although they still required interaction with the Assad regime, they did not have a share in the quasi-monopolistic markets. "Syrian businessmen in general do not like the regime, but they are forced to show their obedience to the regime. You know what will happen if you disobey or criticise the regime," stated an Aleppan real estate investor's wife no7 upon overhearing a retired Syrian who used to work in the Turkish consulate of Aleppo saying "the businessmen used to love the regime."¹⁶²

Strategic businessmen usually possessed a higher number of business partnerships, formally or informally.¹⁶³ And some of their business investments were in more than one sector and they had more business partners to work with than other businessmen.

¹⁶¹ Perthes, "A Look at Syria's Upper Class," 33.

¹⁶² Aleppan real estate investor's wife no7, conversation, Bursa, April 15, 2015.

¹⁶³ The formality of Syrian business partnership will be explained in the later chapter.

Furthermore, some strategic businessmen were actively participating in the local Chambers, the People's Assembly, or the Cham Holding. One of the biggest founders and shareholders of the Cham Holding was a Syrian tycoon¹ who used to be the leading figure in one of the Syrian Chambers. He explained the reason why he joined the Cham Holding, saying, "because Rāmī Makhlūf asked me to join, the regime tried to create a neutral and clean picture of this holding company. And without the Sunni businessmen, they could not achieve this."¹⁶⁴

There are many examples from this group. The Da'būl family founded the Madar company for manufacturing detergent and chemical raw materials in the early 1980s which was the strongest enterprise in the field of cleansing in Syria. The al-Shā'ir family founded their company in 1969 which was the first to work in the field of detergent in Syria. They were listed on the top 100 prominent Syrian businessmen list. The Sayf family was an old family from Damascus who established their clothes industry in 1959. In 2010, they had more than 800 workers. The Šabbāgh Sharabātī family started a textile factory in 1978 and by 2010 had more than 2000 workers. They were the second biggest shareholders of the Sham Holding. The Karyam family first established their refrigerator and household company in 1958 which later developed into a family business by investing in galvanizing iron, machines, and restaurants. And al-'Ulabi was one of the biggest texture industrialists in Syria after

¹⁶⁴ Syrian tycoon¹ who used to be the leading figure in the one of the Syrian Chambers, personal interview, Gaziantep, December 12, 2014.

establishing the texture company (OulabiTex) in 1953 in Aleppo. By 2009 they had around 1800 workers in their factories.¹⁶⁵

Independent Businessmen

The independent businessmen are defined by having distanced themselves from interacting with the regime, building up business partnerships with others, and participating in public affairs, as well as being mostly from a Sunni background. Due to their independent approach, they usually invested in single sectors rather than multiple sectors. Even though their economic, social and political behaviour was less obvious than the other businessmen, this did not limit their economic scale or leave them less well known among other businessmen. The independent businessmen would not have any personal ties with the regime. Nevertheless, they might have known somebody through their personal networks who would solve the compulsory 'bureaucratic routines' with the regime's henchmen. In fact, they might even play on the weakness of the regime's complicated infighting. For instance, Āṣif Shawkat supported Rāmī Makhlūf, and Māhir al-Asad supported Muḥammad Ḥamshū. There was once a conflict between both groups where Rāmī Makhlūf won over Muḥammad Ḥamshū. This is just one known case of the infighting between the Syrian regime's members.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ Da'bul, Madar, Accessed April 15, 2017, <http://madarhd.com/index.php?MenuID=18&PageType=2&Lang=1>, Damascene1 detergent and chemical industrialist, personal interview, Gaziantep, January 28, 2015 (he is the son of the company founder), and "abraz 100 rajul a'māl Surī;" al-Shā'ir, Damascene2 detergent and chemical industrialist, personal interview, Amman, June 19, 2015, and "abraz 100 rajul a'māl Surī;" "abraz 100 rajul a'māl Surī;" Şabbāgh Sharabātī, "abraz 100 rajul a'māl Surī;" Karyam, "abraz 100 rajul a'māl Surī;" al-'Ulabi, "abraz 100 rajul a'māl Surī."

¹⁶⁶ "al-mujrim Muḥammad Ḥamshū," [The criminal Muḥamad Ḥamshu], *Ahlamontada*, July 28, 2011, accessed March 14, 2017, <http://www.syria2011.net/t9692-topic>.

Since the ruling family businessmen's internal fighting was not unknown, the independent businessmen who chose not to ally themselves or become involved with the regime could pretend to be an ally of one side of the infighting businessmen. By doing so, they could distance themselves from unnecessary interventions and annoyances from the regime. A Damascene chemical industrialist explained how he personally played with this internal fight:

Because even among the regime's bureaucrats, they have sensitive rift among different groups; whenever an official from group A comes to me and tries to force me to form a business partnership with him or ask me to pay a bribe, I always pretend that I already have another business partner from the official's from group B and vice versa. Which I never did.¹⁶⁷

	Ties with the regime	Religious sect	Economic size	Economic investment	Business partnerships	Political orientation	Political participation		
Ruling family businessmen	Inside the regime	Alawite	Huge	Multi-sectors	Many	Unwavering allegiance	Exclusively involved		
		Shia							
Crony businessmen	Close ties	Sunni	Upper-high			Single sector	Medium or individual	Loyal to the regime	Semi-participation
Strategic businessmen	Strategic ties							Strategic alliance	
Independent businessmen	Distant ties			Medium		Personally not related to the regime		Non-participation	
				Small					

Table 2.1 Categorisation of Syrian businessmen prior to the 2011 revolution

¹⁶⁷ Damascene detergent and chemical industrialist no1, personal interview, Gaziantep, January 28, 2015.

Since they did not have any strong ties with the political centre and focused exclusively on their business investment, they preferred to remain silent on any political-related affairs, even when they actually had any opinions about it. And most of the businessmen in Syria were located in this and the former group.

2.2 The pre-revolution Syrian political-economic environment

Syrian businessmen could not avoid having their economic investments and activities in the pre-2011 era interact with the Syrian regime and were strongly affected by the regime. In order to break down the state-dominated Syrian market's impacts on the Syrian businessmen prior to 2011, this section will examine the legislations and reforms; the laws and judicial system; the banking system; the representation of businessmen in the pre-revolution Syria; and the intelligence bureaucracy inside Syria prior to 2011. These five dimensions not only developed under the Syrian regime's command but also directly influenced Syrian businessmen's daily activities. Examining these five dimensions will contextualise pre-revolution Syrian politico economics and facilitate the understanding of how this environment affected businessmen before 2011, and will further delineate the main features of the pre-2011 Syrian political economy.

a. Rule of law or rule by law?

In Syria, if you have enough money, you can buy a law.

Dozens of economic regulations, laws, and economic policies were issued from the 1970s to the end of the pre-revolution period in Syria. The most frequently discussed are the two economic *infithah* (economic opening) during Hafiz al-Assad's reign in the 1980s and 1990s (which includes the issuance of Investment Law No. 10 in 1991), and the economic reform policy after the accession of Bashar al-Assad in 2000.¹⁶⁹ It is not the objective of this section to analyse whether these regulations, laws, or economic policies were successful or not from an economic perspective, but rather, to focus on the implementation of these regulations, laws, and economic policies as studies consistently indicate the absolute nature of these laws and reforms.

First, the regime had political and economic interests that were un-negotiably outside the reach of reform, and laws could not touch them. Perthes demonstrates that "the specific development of Syria's private sector has, to a large extent, been determined by political decisions, i.e., by decisions of those running state affairs."¹⁷⁰ The regime's interests can also be observed in other issuances of laws and economic liberalisation, which existed even after the accession of Bashar in 2000.¹⁷¹ Research indicates that a certain number of old entrepreneurs benefited from these regulations and reforms, and that a new class of entrepreneurs emerged under these regulation and policy changes.¹⁷² Wealth was mostly distributed into the hands of the businessmen

¹⁶⁸ Aleppo plastic businessman no8, personal interview, Mersin, February 5, 2015.

¹⁶⁹ Perthes, "The Syrian Private Industrial," 230; Haddad, *Business Networks in Syria*; Abboud, "The Political Economy of Marketization."

¹⁷⁰ Perthes, "The Syrian Private Industrial," 207.

¹⁷¹ Saowski, "Patronage and the Ba'th," 449; Matthew Gray, "The Political Economy of Tourism in Syria: State, Society, and Economic Liberalization," *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 19, no. 2 (1997): 69, 70; Haddad, *Business Networks in Syria*, 138-40.

¹⁷² Perthes, *The Political Economy*, 111-13; Haddad, *Business Networks in Syria*, 20.

who were close to the centre of the Syrian regime. As Ghadbian illustrates, “These liberties were the President’s reward for absolute loyalty, which meant carrying out the dirty work that was often necessary to preserve the security and stability of the regime.” The President includes the small entrepreneurial class and their protectors in the security, and the military elite as the liberties.¹⁷³

As Hinnebusch states, the 1970s trade liberalization extended corruption in the country.¹⁷⁴ This corruption continued after Hafiz’s death in 2000 when Bashar came into power; large-scale economic opportunities were still controlled and dominated by the regime’s business networks.¹⁷⁵ Under the pretext of laws and reforms, it merits a discussion of the nature of these processes of economic opening and economic reform policy. The nature of the Syrian style of ‘rule of law’ status in pre-2011 Syria, to a great extent, determined the Syrian businessmen’s behaviour in the pre-2011 era.

Law No. 10 in 1991 received some positive evaluation from the academic field. As Polling suggests, the Law “goes far beyond these earlier measures and introduces qualitatively new features.”¹⁷⁶ However, before Law No. 10 was issued, a group of crony businessmen had already learned about the new law and what sectors would be profitable for them to invest in.¹⁷⁷ Moreover, the regime supported the crony businessmen by manipulating regulations. An Aleppan plastic industrialist no9 stated that,

¹⁷³ Najib Ghadbian, “The New Asad: Dynamics of Continuity and Change in Syria,” *Middle East Journal*, 55, no. 4 (2001): 635.

¹⁷⁴ Raymond Hinnebusch, “The Political Economy of Economic Liberalization in Syria,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 27, no. 3 (1995): 311.

¹⁷⁵ Bassam Haddad, “Business as Usual in Syria?” *MERIP Press Information*, Note 68 (September 2001).

¹⁷⁶ Polling, “Investment Law No. 10,” 14.

¹⁷⁷ Lattakia automobile parts businessman no1, personal interview, Istanbul, March 5, 2015. He used to be a business partner with the son of Šā’ib Naḥḥās, who was one out of the troika businessmen,

What the regime will do is, they will issue a law and validate the law immediately after it is passed. For instance, in mid-2000, after letting a crony businessman's imported goods pass through customs and transport into the country, then the government issued a law to raise the custom tax all of a sudden. By doing so, other businessmen's goods [which were still in the customs] were sold higher than his. So the crony businessman can easily win out from the market since he can sell his goods at a much lower price.¹⁷⁸

Second, even though there were thousands of regulations and laws inside Syria regarding business and investment, the regime and its civil servants usually exploited the laws to extract money from the businessmen, even without a legal basis. An Aleppan foods tycoon whose brother was the former vice president of the Aleppan Chamber of Industry and whose family was listed in the 100 prominent businessmen list in 2009 and 2010 stated that,

The auditor fined me 3 million Syrian pounds (around \$67,000) in the late 2000s; they came to me and just told me: we know you're playing the game with us, even though we could not find out where you breached the law. So you deserve the fine.¹⁷⁹

Another Damascene businessman who owned a series of bookshops and printing factories explained a similar case:

No matter how we obey the law, they [the regime and the civil servants] can always find an excuse to fine you. Once, I put the price of the book in Latin numbers, and then the auditor fined me because of this, because I did not use the Arabic number [the law said that you need to have a price on each book in the

¹⁷⁸ Aleppan plastic industrialist no9, personal interview, 6th of October, October 13, 2015.

¹⁷⁹ Aleppan food industrialist no2, personal interview, Gaziantep, June 1, 2014; "abraz 100 rajul a 'māl Surī."

shop, but did not mention whether it should be in Arabic or Latin numerals]. These auditors came to us as they were representing the law, but what they were doing was coming here for a bribe.¹⁸⁰

Interviews with the expatriate Syrian businessmen revealed dozens of stories similar to these, too numerous to be listed here. Additional stories included the repressions by the president's cousin, Rāmī Makhlūf, and his corrupt business circle on other businessmen. Various cases of the use of laws and economic reforms or policies between the 1970s to 2011 in Syria suggest that the nature and logic of the Syrian regime's 'issuance of laws' or 'reform processes' never changed – it was always corruption, injustice, and lack of transparency.

b. The laws and judicial system

Usually we know that the results of adjudication in Syria depend on how much you pay the judge and who you know in the government.

- A Damascene car rental businessman no5¹⁸¹

Article 4 of the emergency law released in 1963 restricted the freedom of assembly of people inside Syria.¹⁸² No matter what the case may be, if the regime suspects someone, they can easily arrest him according to this Article. The Damascene household items industrialist no6 explained how this law affected his social meetings:

¹⁸⁰ Damascene bookshops owner and printing industrialist no4, personal interview, Amman, August 13, 2015.

¹⁸¹ Damascene car rental businessman no5, personal interview, Amman, July 17, 2015.

¹⁸² “naṣṣ qānūn al-ṭawārī’ al-Sūrī 1962,” [The text of the Syrian Emergency Law] *Aljazeera*, August 11 2011, accessed March 12, 2017,

<http://www.aljazeera.net/encyclopedia/events/2011/8/11/%D9%86%D8%B5-%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B7%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A6-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A-1962>.

If you have more than ten people who want to gather together, then you need to apply for permission from the government, no matter what kind of reason for gathering, otherwise it is illegal.¹⁸³

The existence of this emergency law deterred social gatherings of Syrian businessmen in pre-revolution Syria who were too afraid to gather with uncertain consequences.

Even worse, some laws were out-dated and unrevised. For example, economic criminal law in Syria was first to be issued by Legislative Decree No. 37 in 1966, and it was not until 2013 that the People's Assembly in Syria issued a new draft to amend this 47-year-old law.¹⁸⁴

During the four-decade rule of the Assad family over Syria, the country has experienced different degrees of economic liberalisation and transition. Since the seizure of power by Hafiz al-Assad in 1970, the state's economic strategy has moved from hard-line socialist Ba'th to more pragmatic and economic.¹⁸⁵ In addition to changing the main economic guiding principle, the pressures from social and economic realities inside Syria pressured Hafiz to apply two waves of *infitah* (economic opening) issuing different laws at the beginning of the 1970s and in the late 1980s.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸³ Damascene household items industrialist no6, personal interview, Amman, August 12, 2015.

¹⁸⁴ "anha al-'amal bi-l-marsūm al-tashrī'ī raqam 37 li-'ām 1966 wa-ta'dilāti-hi." [Terminate the work with the Legislative Decree No. 37 of 1966 and its amendment], *Fedaa*, March 19 2013, accessed March 13, 2017, <http://fedaa.alwehda.gov.sy/node/144546>.

¹⁸⁵ Syed Aziz-al-Ahsan, "Economic Policy and Class Structure in Syria: 1958-1980," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 16, no. 3 (1984): 317.

¹⁸⁶ Perthes, *The Political Economy*, 50-61.

Nevertheless, the implementation of other laws involving Syrian businessmen did not work consistently or transparently. A fiscal crisis in the second half of the 1980s drove the regime to apply another broader wave of *infitah* in the country, but the state did not change its intervention in or domination of the private sector.¹⁸⁷ A more open economic regulation – Law No. 10 – was issued in 1991.¹⁸⁸ This Law No. 10 “constituted the cornerstone of all liberalization steps before 2001.”¹⁸⁹ Nevertheless, Perthes argues that not until nearly a decade after the issuance of Law No. 10 did the government embark on another trend of economic reform.¹⁹⁰

In 2006, the former vice president of the Chamber of Industry in Aleppo was charged with ‘tax evasion.’¹⁹¹ However, no other adjudications were released publicly afterwards. During an interview with his brother, his brother explained what was happening regarding the incident: “Someone proposed an incorrect report to the ministry and accused my brother of breaching the law of tax evasion, which was not true. At the end, my brother was fined \$800,000 to finish the adjudication.”¹⁹² This was just one case out of the numerous other groundless business adjudications. Sometimes the regime would punish businessmen who were no longer in their favour through official investigations. Living under this uncertain context before the law, the Syrian businessmen did not know when they might be out of favour and become overnight ‘criminals’.

¹⁸⁷ Sukkar, “The Crisis of 1986 and Syria’s Plan for Reform,” 27-38.

¹⁸⁸ Polling, “Investment Law No. 10,” 14-25.

¹⁸⁹ Samir Seifan, “The Road to Economic Reform in Syria,” *Syria Studies*, 2 (2010): 5.

¹⁹⁰ Perthes, *Syria under Bashar al-Asad*, 28.

¹⁹¹ “ra’īs majlis al-wuzarā’ yushakkil lajna li’l-tadqiq fi ḥisābāt rajul al-a’māl al-ma’rūf Ghassān Karīm,” [Prime Minister forms a committee to scrutinize the accounts of the well-known businessman Ghassan Kryaem], *Syria-News*, February 12 2006, accessed March 13, 2017, http://syria-news.com/readnews.php?sy_seq=21892.

¹⁹² Aleppan food industrialist no2, personal interview, Gaziantep, June 1, 2014.

In addition to dealing with unstable and unclear applications of law, the Syrian business community did not trust the judicial system since it lacked justice. Prior to the 2011 revolution, religious scholars were favoured in informal arbitrations among Syrian merchants whenever a business dispute occurred, as Ismail suggests.¹⁹³ The court itself “denies or limits the defendant’s right to appeal, limits access to legal counsel, tries most cases behind closed doors, and admits as evidence confessions obtained through torture.”¹⁹⁴ A Damascene car rental businessman no5 stated that, “we do not trust the court in Syria. You need to pay a bribe to win a lawsuit. If there is a problem between two businessmen, they prefer to solve it themselves.”¹⁹⁵

To avoid contacting or interacting with the Syrian courts, the Syrian businessmen preferred to solve their business disputes by themselves. “What we do is, both disputers will respectively get another reputable business person from their side and will seek a religious scholar who has knowledge of business operations, and the religious scholar would decide,” explained an Aleppan real estate investor no20.¹⁹⁶ One Aleppan automobile industrialist no21, who was also the son of a famous Aleppan Muslim scholar, was often asked by other businessmen to be the arbiter for this kind of informal arbitration. He explained how this informal arbitration works,

The informal arbitration is based on the Sharia principle [Islamic law]. The two disputers would both agree on an arbitrator who is pious and experienced, and each of them would both find another person from their side to participate in this

¹⁹³ Ismail, “Changing Social Structure,” 26.

¹⁹⁴ “Syria,” *Freedom house*, 2003, accessed March 13, 2017, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2003/syria>.

¹⁹⁵ Damascene car rental businessman no5, personal interview, Amman, July 17, 2015.

¹⁹⁶ Aleppan real estate investor no20, personal interview, Adana, April 15, 2015.

arbitration. The disputer who raised the arbitration is called ‘oppressed’ (mazlūm), and he would need to prepare the evidence of receipts, or contracts, or other witnesses regarding the business dispute. The other disputer who was charged by the first ‘oppressed,’ is the ‘denier’ (munkar) of the charges. If he denied all the charges, he would put his right hand on the Quran and claim that he rejected the charges (ḥilf al-yamīn). The arbiter needed to let these two disputers sign a blank paper to show that they would accept this arbitration. The results of arbitrations were accepted by our courts in Syria if the informal arbitrations were conducted with two other witnesses. Before, in Aleppo, this kind of informal arbitrations was prevalent, not only for businesses, but also for marriage or other disputes. Usually the arbiters would be ‘knowledgeable ones’ (with knowledge of Islamic laws) or from religious families.¹⁹⁷

The application of the informal arbitration among the Syrian businessmen in Syria was a civil mechanism which developed due to the lack of trust from the businessmen towards the Syrian courts.

c. Banking system

Syrian businessmen either deposit their money in Western or Lebanese banks, or they only deal in cash, since we do not trust the banking system inside Syria.

- An Aleppan dessert industrialist no10¹⁹⁸

The Syrian banking system in pre-2011 Syria was considered to be “poor intermediaries with the domestic private sectors,” as Abboud has shown.¹⁹⁹ The report from the World Bank in 2005 also indicates that few private firms in Syria benefited from their financial sector, where “fully 88% of firms received no working

¹⁹⁷ Aleppan automobile industrialist no21, personal interview, Mersin, February 04, 2015.

¹⁹⁸ Aleppan dessert industrialist no10, personal interview, Mersin, February 11, 2015.

¹⁹⁹ Abboud, “The Political Economy of Marketization,” 123.

capital from banks and 88% received no investment finance from banks.”²⁰⁰ Private banks started to operate in Syria in 2004, three years after the issuance of the private bank law, and six private banks opened since then. However, the operation of the private banks indicates that the Syrian banking system was more or less under the influence of the regime and the regime’s henchmen, and the Syrian businessmen did not trust the banking system.

First, the Ministry of Finance did not provide the new private banks with enough freedoms for setting up their own budgets or developing their own business strategies.²⁰¹ In addition, some of the banks are even under-funded and only have a limited amount of money for long-term loans. The possibility for the banks to provide loans to companies was also constrained since many companies could not present a reliable balance sheet and there was a lack of transparency in the companies’ accounting.”²⁰² These issues indicate that the government did not provide the required assistance which was necessary for private banks to operate, which made it difficult for the banks to prosper.

Second, most prominent Syrian shareholders of these banks were cronies of the regime, such as, Rāmī Makhlūf. These powerful ‘private’ investors still controlled the main decision-making processes of the banks.²⁰³ Thus, the emergence of the private banks after 2004 did not achieve the original goal of attracting other investors into the Syrian financial sector. An example of the unbalanced provision of loans was that

²⁰⁰ Syrian Investment Climate Assessment: Unlocking the Potential of the Private Sector. Washington, *World Bank* (2005) 38.

²⁰¹ Borshchevskaya, “Sponsored Corruption,” 47.

²⁰² Nimord Raphaeli, “Syria’s Fragile Economy,” *MERIA*, 11, no.2 (2007): 40, accessed March 13, 2017, <http://www.rubincenter.org/meria/2007/06/Raphaeli.pdf>.

²⁰³ Marshall, “Syria and the Financial Crisis,” 110.

new entrepreneurs did not have the same opportunity as other business tycoons to apply for loans.²⁰⁴

Third, the lack of reform of the state banks was another problem that influenced the development of private banks. Since the Central Bank of Syria still played an important role in creating banking regulations – even though the regime claimed to have reformed the banking sector – the restructuring of the state banks contradicted the official announcement.²⁰⁵ An International Monetary Fund report describes the Syrian state banks as “inappropriate [in] accounting, loan classification and provisioning rules, collateral appraisal, and the continuous rescheduling of non-performing loans.”²⁰⁶

Thus, it was not common for Syrian businessmen to use the banking system in Syria due to the lack of trust between the business community toward the banking system inside the country. Anderson also demonstrates that almost all yarn transactions were conducted through cash rather than bank in Syria.²⁰⁷ As stated the Aleppan food industrialist no2, “When we all left Syria and started to invest overseas, the Syrian regime was shocked: how was there so much money inside Syria which we were not aware of?”²⁰⁸

²⁰⁴ Haddad, “The Political Economy of Syria,” 53; Ali Kadri, *The Political Economy of the Syrian Crisis*, *Working Papers in Technology Governance and Economic Dynamics* no. 46, (2012): 29, accessed March 13, 2017, <http://hum.ttu.ee/wp/paper46.pdf>.

²⁰⁵ Borshchevskaya, “Sponsored Corruption,” 47.

²⁰⁶ “Syrian Arab Republic: Selected Issues,” *International Monetary Fund*, (2006) 34, accessed March 13, 2017, <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2006/cr06295.pdf>.

²⁰⁷ Paul Anderson, “Aleppo’s Yarn Market: Trust and Speculation in a Time of Economic Transformation,” in *Alep et ses territoires. Fabrique et politique d'une ville, 1868 – 2011*, ed. Jean-Claude David and Thierry Boissière (Presses de l’Ifpo, 2013) 334.

²⁰⁸ Aleppan food industrialist no2, personal interview, Gaziantep, December 29, 2014.

Since the banking system was generally not trusted by the Syrian businessmen, using non-interest loans (al-dayn) was a common way of doing business in the Syrian business community in the pre-revolution era for managing the capital which banks could not provide them. There were two types of non-interest loans: one was in goods, and the other was in cash. Syrian businessmen used to give goods to other businessmen whom they considered trustworthy prior to paying for the goods. The Aleppan plastic industrialist no9 explained how they conducted this method of mutual support,

If a Syrian businessman went bankrupt, he might announce the bankruptcy to his fellow businessmen. They would gather together and the others would help him to recovery 60-70% of his former business by giving him raw materials, machines, and allowing him to return these goods after one year's time. But the precondition was they needed to know this person well enough and have trust in them.²⁰⁹

Using non-interest loans is an informal economic activity which is not contract-based or legally binding. This means that businessmen who choose to give a non-interest loan may lose their money if the other does not return the full amount that he received. Thus, most non-interest loans were usually given to those who had a reputable name in the market or to those whom the lender had known for a long time and trusted. "We might not know them, but we know their fathers, their uncles, and their brothers. So we know this person is from a good and honest family and we will not overthink the case, rather we'll give them the loan directly," stated a Damascene clothes businessman no11.²¹⁰

²⁰⁹ Aleppan plastic industrialist no9, personal interview, 6th of October, October 13, 2015.

²¹⁰ Damascene clothes businessman no11, personal interview, Cairo, October 07, 2015.

d. The representation of businessmen

The Chambers have no functions, only a handful of people benefited from it, especially the ones who are close to the regime.

- A Homs electronic goods businessman no1²¹¹

Hinnebush stated that during the economic liberalisation of Syria, the chambers not only could “press the implementation of liberalisation”, but could also “expand its parameters” if they pledged to the regime’s economic strategy, whereas, on the other hand, Haddad argues that, “an important characteristic of the Syrian private sector is that it has no genuine representation.”²¹² The representation of Syrian businessmen in the economic and political sectors can be observed in the operations of the Chambers and People’s Assembly inside Syria. However, even though businessmen did participate in these institutions, their participation did not mean that they had real rights as representatives.

The operation of chambers, however, was supposed to be independent and protect the interests of the private sectors from the people who were in charge in the offices in the Syrian Chambers. It was not difficult to see that the regime was still the one who really had the control of these ‘independent’ business associations.²¹³ Furthermore, the regime also intervened in the presidential election of the chambers. In 2009, a local Syrian news report released a story stating that Muḥammad Ṣabbāgh Sharabāṭī and Ghassān Karyam were suddenly withdrawing from the election of the Aleppan

²¹¹ Homs electronic goods businessman no1, personal interview, Gaziantep, May 30, 2014.

²¹² Hinnebusch, “Syria: The Politics of Economic Liberalisation,” 259; Haddad, “Enduring Legacies,” 42.

²¹³ Donati, “The Economics of Authoritarian Upgrading in Syria,” 42.

Chamber of Industry.²¹⁴ The news further quoted Mr Sharabātī as saying he wanted to have some rest [so he withdrew]. However, the truth was not as simple as the news had stated. “My brother and Mr Sharabātī were elected as the vice president and president of the Chamber of Industry in Aleppo, but then the regime asked them to resign and replaced them with Fāris al-Shihābi,” said the Aleppan food industrialist no2.²¹⁵ An Aleppan textile industrialist no11 explained the follow-up story to Mr Sharabātī’s resignation,

After Mr Sharabātī stepped down, he went to the head of the *mukhabarat* and asked them how he could explain to other businessmen about his resignation? The *mukhabarat* replied to him: just tell them that the *mukhabarat* do not prefer you in the seat.²¹⁶

This did not only happen in Aleppo, the presidential election of the Chamber of Commerce in Damascus also experienced a similar situation. “In the beginning, Muḥammad al-Shā‘ir was elected as the president of the Chamber of Industry in Damascus. But then the regime asked him to step down,” stated a Damascene clothes businessman no7.²¹⁷ The uncovered stories behind the presidential elections in the Syrian Chambers demonstrate the corruption and intervention of the regime to the supposedly independent business organisations.

In addition to the chambers, some businessmen also participated in the People’s Assembly election and became members of the Assembly. During the 1990 election

²¹⁴ “insihāb Muḥammad Ṣabbāgh Sharabātī wa Ghassān Karīm bi-shakl mufāji‘ min intikhābāt ghurfat ṣinā‘at Ḥalab,” [Muḥammad ṣabbāgh Sharabātī and Ghassān Karīm suddenly withdrawal of Aleppo Chamber of Industry elections], *Syria-News*, December 17, 2009, accessed March 13, 2017, http://syria-news.com/readnews.php?sy_seq=106351.

²¹⁵ Aleppan food industrialist no2, personal interview, Gaziantep, December 29, 2014.

²¹⁶ Aleppan textile industrialist no11, personal interview, Gaziantep, December 20, 2014.

²¹⁷ Damascene clothes businessman no7, personal interview, Amman, August 15, 2015.

of the People's Assembly, the regime increased seats from 195 to 250, and approximately one-third of the deputies were reserved for the independent candidates, which included a group of businessmen. However, the bottom line was clear for these individual deputies who could never criticise the regime or its cronies. As Haddad argues, "The People's Council was largely ceremonial and ineffective at the time, deliberating on local and politically nonsensitive matters."²¹⁸ This 'ceremonial' sense of operation of the Council can be perceived by the fact that businessmen who were elected as parliamentarians during the Bashar al-Assad era may possess strong personal ties with the regime, such as Muḥammad Ḥamshū and Hāshim al-Aqqād, the former being from the ruling business family group and the latter belonging to the crony businessmen group, as previously stated.²¹⁹

When Bashar came into power, the aftermath of the short lived Damascus spring was the imprisonment of Riyāḍ Sayf and Ma'mūn al-Ḥumṣi in 2001 due to their civil activities and outspoken criticism of the regime and, more specifically, for Sayf's criticism of the mobile operating contract of the president's cousin Rāmī Makhlūf.²²⁰ The imprisonment of Riyāḍ Sayf not only demonstrated the regime's strong will against any potential political opposition but also sent a signal to its business community: no businesses can develop across the political red line. Thus, both the

²¹⁸ Haddad, *Business Networks in Syria*, 202.

²¹⁹ Thomas Pierret, *Religion and State in Syria: The Sunni Ulama from Coup to Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) 153.

²²⁰ Flynt Leverett, *Inheriting Syria: Bashar's Trial by Fire* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2005) 94; "Sūriyā tuṭliq sarāḥ Riyāḍ Sayf wa al-Ḥumṣi mutwār," [Syria launches release the Riyaād Sayf and al-humṣi diasappeared], *Aljazeera*, February 15, 2006, accessed March 14, 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.net/news/arabic/2006/2/15/%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D8%AA%D8%B7%D9%84%D9%82-%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AD-%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B6-%D8%B3%D9%8A%D9%81-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%B5%D9%8A-%D9%85%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B1>.

operations of the Syrian chambers and the participations of businessmen in the People's Assembly in Syria prior to 2011 demonstrate that Syrian businessmen merely had limited autonomy and influence in these institutions, since the Syrian regime remained the final decision-making body in the end.

e. The walls have ears: the Syrian *mukhabarat* (intelligence service)

Once when I was traveling in Malaysia in 2006, I met an Egyptian and we were discussing Hafiz al-Assad. When he mentioned the name of Hafiz al-Assad, he lowered his volume and said: may Allah bring mercy to him. I told him Allah would never bring mercy to that guy [Hafiz]. You see how scary the Syrian mukhabarat is in our minds? Even an Egyptian in Malaysia would be afraid of it.

- A Damascene furniture businessman no8²²¹

The Syrian government was notorious for monitoring its people through the intelligence service. Not only would people who had dissenting political ideas end up in prison or disappear without reason, but businessmen who owned companies or factories would be targeted by the *mukhabarat* for money. Syrian businessmen who possessed millions of dollars or extensive property in particular were worried about the disturbances of the *mukhabarat*.

The regime would be patron to particular businessmen who obeyed the words of the regime.²²² This led businessmen to compete with each other for the special favours.

²²¹ Damascene furniture businessman no8, personal interview, Istanbul, May 14, 2014.

²²² Perthes, *The Political Economy*, 262; Haddad, *Business Networks in Syria*, 3.

Businessmen might not only report disloyal or rebellious activity of other businessmen in order to uproot their competition to the *mukhabarat*, but they might also defame their business competitors. Moreover, the *mukhabarat* system distorted the businessmen's attitudes toward their fellow business countrymen. "Can you imagine a son writes a report to accuse his father, or a brother writes a report to accuse his brother just for money? The regime made people monitor each other," stated a Damascene real estate investor no9.²²³ As a result of this social atmosphere, people did not trust each other very easily. Rather, they were cautious about developing social relationships with others. "When I was a kid, my mother always told me that 'the walls have ears.' So we learned to be cautious with other people since we were young," stated an Aleppan technical company businessman no12.²²⁴

The Syrian *mukhabarat* were not just passively waiting for businessmen to breach the law in order to find an excuse to 'share' their wealth, but rather they were also actively engaging in some of the profitable investments of the businessmen as 'business partners'. Once a businessman's investment became conspicuous or famous in Syria, it was then time to wait for a visit from the *mukhabarat*. The *mukhabarat* would ask the businessmen to become business partners, sometimes even without giving any capital to the businessmen. This meant that businessmen had two choices: either accept the offers from the *mukhabarat* or stop their businesses. The Aleppan plastic industrialist no9 stated that he knew another Aleppan businessman who had been working in the food industry. Once the businessman's investment had become popular, the *mukhabarat* came to him and asked to become business partners with him. The businessman refused in the beginning, but then the *mukhabarat* told him that: "if

²²³ Damascene real estate investor no9, personal interview, Istanbul, December 15, 2014.

²²⁴ Aleppan technical company businessman no12, personal interview, Gaziantep, December 1, 2014.

you refuse, we will buy the lands next to you, and build up the same products as yours but with a bigger factory than yours [then you will close your factory by yourself].” In the end the businessman had no choice but to accept this demand of partnering with the *mukhabarat*.²²⁵

The *mukhabarat* also took part in the presidential elections of the Chambers in Syria, as shown in the previous section. This kind of social atmosphere made people extremely cautious about their social gatherings and businesses. The Damascene real estate investor no9 stated that,

If you have a good business idea which is highly profitable, but you do not work with the regime or do not let them be your partner, then the result may be either you will not receive the working permit or your business will bump into many ‘technical problems.’²²⁶

Most Syrian businessmen experienced or heard about what the regime would do to them if they did not cooperate with the regime or if they disobeyed the regime’s orders.

During the fieldwork interviews, almost all the informants criticised the *mukhabarat* system inside their country, but before they started to denounce the *mukhabarat*’s abominable behaviours, they would look around to make sure that no one else was listening to the conversation. People in Syria constantly lived in a state of fear for forty years since they did not know when the *mukhabarat* would come to them or when they would be prosecuted for imaginary illegal charges. “They imprisoned me

²²⁵ Aleppan plastic industrialist no9, personal interview, 6th of October, October 13, 2015.

²²⁶ Damascene real estate investor no9, personal interview, Istanbul, December 15, 2014.

for one day, just because I drove a fancy car on the street. I paid \$2000 for release,” said an Aleppo clothes industrialist no13 who claimed that he was a millionaire before the revolution.²²⁷ Another Damascene restaurateur no10 who owned a series of restaurants in Istanbul stated that he was imprisoned for 23 days in 2003 only because he asked his friend to learn business skills from Turkish people, and his friend was shamed into anger and reported him to the authorities.²²⁸ “You do not know if the person you are talking to is from the regime or not. The regime uses the *mukhabarat* to create fears in the country, and make people not to trust each other,” stated the Damascene real estate investor no9.²²⁹

The existence of excessive, vicious interventions of the *mukhabarat* system on the Syrian business community in Syria seriously affected how Syrian businessmen interacted with each other. The lack of trust among the Syrian business community worsened in this context since no one wanted to become a target of the *mukhabarat* or get unwittingly interrogated or imprisoned.

Examining the five dimensions of the former political economic environment in pre-2011 Syria suggests that the main factors which affected the business community in the pre-revolution Syria were never about the regulations and reform, or the laws and judicial system, or the banking system, or the business representation, or the monitor of intelligence service. Rather, the main factors were the nature of these practices and institutions: corruption with nepotism, legal insecurity with state intervention, and the lack of transparency in the public sector.

²²⁷ Aleppo clothes industrialist no13, personal interview, Gaziantep, May 28, 2014.

²²⁸ Damascene restaurateur no10, personal interview, Istanbul, April 17, 2014.

²²⁹ Damascene real estate investor no9, personal interview, Istanbul, December 15, 2014.

This nature weakened the businessmen's confidence in the state systems and institutions. More importantly, businessmen became cautious while dealing with other fellow countrymen since the external environment was full of suspicion and distrust. In this environment, businessmen chose either to ally with the regime, uncertain of the consequences, or to depend on their own business acquaintances. Regardless of how many laws or 'reforms' were issued, the red line did not change, that is, the protection of interests and power of the regime. Economically, the businessmen might confront unexpected legal charges by the regime. As an Aleppan textile industrialist no14 stated,

Sometimes they tell you this is legal, or they may turn a blind eye to your illegal way of doing businesses by accepting your bribes. However, all of a sudden, the government may charge you with the name of the breach of law. If you are lucky enough, you just pay more bribe to solve the issue; but if you are not that lucky, then you may be bankrupted.²³⁰

And the judicial and banking systems did not provide enough of justice or efficiency to the businessmen. Syrian businessmen were not willing to engage in or use these opaque or low-efficiency institutions rather seek help from the civil mechanisms they developed.

Politically, businessmen were not allowed to disobey the regime's 'political correctness' since they would be killed or put in prison, such as in the early 1980s when 'Ādil Bādīnjki, who was a wood industrialist and participated in the uprising

²³⁰ Aleppan textile industrialist no14, personal interview, Mersin, February 5, 2015.

against the Syrian regime, was later arrested by the regime and died in their hands.²³¹ Additionally, there were the cases of Riyād Sayf and Ma'mūn al-Ḥumṣi, mentioned previously, where in supposedly 'autonomous' institutions, like the chambers, decisions were not made and personnel were not elected, but rather were influenced by the regime.

Even if businessmen wanted to donate their money to needy people, this could draw the concerns from the local officials. The Damascene detergent and chemical industrialist no2 who was from the 100 prominent businessmen list stated that,

My father was donating money and food for the poor widows in Damascus, then 100 people came to the distribution place to collect the goods. During the distribution, the intelligence services came to us, asking what we were doing, and they tried to make problems for us. But after paying them the bribe, they just left.²³²

Since the economic, political, and social environments were not determinate as the businessmen could expect, they were afraid of or cautious about building up social relationships and conducting business or other activities with other fellow business countrymen. As such, due the previous political economic environment and the social atmosphere in Syria, the networking among the Syrian business community was discreet and full of suspicion.

2.3 Business, political, and philanthropic activities

²³¹ Aleppo dessert industrialist no15, personal interview, Gaziantep, January 02, 2015. He is also the son of 'Ādil Bādinjki.

²³² Damascene detergent and chemical industrialist no2, personal interview, Amman, June 19, 2015.

As has been demonstrated, interaction among the Syrian businessmen was cautious and full of suspicion since the former political economic environment limited the possibility of trust among the businessmen. It is important to continue examining the situation, now focusing on the business, political, and philanthropic activities of the Syrian businessmen in order to understand how Syrian businessmen conducted their activities under the Assad regime prior to 2011. This will demonstrate that even though the former political economic environment made the businessmen cautious and distrustful of each other, they still actively engaged in economic and philanthropic work, and, limitedly, participated in political activities.

a. Struggling between a rock and a hard place – the business

If you have a partner, you have a mu'allim.

- Syrian proverb among the Syrian businessmen²³³

As previously shown, Haddad has demonstrated that the numbers of the business partnership inside Syrian companies were limited, signifying that businessmen were used to individual or family businesses. Again, he argues that this is attributed to the lack of trust between the state and the businessmen.²³⁴ In addition to Haddad's argument, I will argue that the specific style of doing business was another factor contributing to the lack of business partnerships.

Limited business partnerships: a Syrian style

²³³ This proverb came up many times during the interviews with Syrian businessmen. After I asked why they decided not to build up business partnerships with others, they would try to explain by repeating this proverb first.

²³⁴ Haddad, *Business Networks in Syria*, 38.

“If you have a partner, you have a mu’allim,” is a widely recognised proverb among the Syrian business community. “Mu’allim” here is not the literal meaning of ‘teacher’ in Arabic, but rather, it indicates a “boss.” Syrian businessmen generally believe in this proverb, since one does not want a partner to be a boss, they prefer to work in a family business or start their business. This was another aspect of the Syrian business community which existed for a long time.

“When we were kids, we saw how our grandfathers or fathers work. Very few of the businessmen from my father’s generation had a business partner,” stated an Aleppan cleaning tools industrialist no16 in his early 40s.²³⁵ He continued that, “My grandfather used to have a business partnership with his brother. In the beginning everything was going well, however, when the children of my grandfather and the children of his brother grew up, the problems started to show.” He explained that after his father and his cousins grew up, the fathers tried to put their sons into different leading positions in the companies, such as CEO, or manager, etc. The problem was that not all his uncles had the same ability and passion for business, but they did not believe another’s ability was better than his. Since the fathers were both the owners of the company and business partners, they expected their sons to maintain good positions in the businesses. This was how the family business dispute started to grow. “At the end, my grandfather and his brother split the businesses into two because they had issues as to which son should work in which position in the company, and in our generation we all know this family issue.”

²³⁵ Aleppan cleaning tools industrialist no16, personal interview, Amman, August 13, 2015.

Furthermore, Syrian businessmen have unspoken rules called the ‘Ḥājjī system’ (Nizām al-Ḥājjī) which had been prevalent in almost all Syrian companies for a long time. In the Ḥājjī system, a company is not usually well organised, but rather a businessman would prefer to take charge of all the business details by himself, from the small bills to the goods exportation. In the Ḥājjī system, it is normal to give orders to other people rather than consult their opinions. “Why should I have a business partner? If I have a business partner, we may even get into a fight regarding where to put this table in the office,” stated an Aleppan children clothes industrialist no17.²³⁶

For businessmen who work for themselves, some consider a businessman who has a business partner to be ‘the weak businessman.’ “I have enough of capital, why do I need to have a business partner? Having a business partner means that you do not have enough capital, so you need to have another person to start a business with,” said an Aleppan shoes industrialist no18.²³⁷

Factors for increasing and decreasing trust: family name and city origin

Syrian businessmen were extremely careful while doing businesses with others since the ineffective and corrupted state institutions restricted the possibility to trust. However, the family name and the city origin were the two factors that might increase or decrease the trust among the networking of Syrian businessmen.

Family name in the Syrian business community was critical since most people respect a person’s family name even without knowing the individual personally. The family

²³⁶ Aleppan children clothes industrialist no17, personal interview, Cairo, November 03, 2015.

²³⁷ Aleppan shoes industrialist no18, personal interview, Gaziantep, February 22, 2015.

name is a symbol that can represent a person's work ethic and businesses before meeting the real person, whether in a good or bad way. For example, Da'būl, al-Shā'ir and Šabbāgh Sharabātī (mentioned previously) and al-Nan have positive reputations that precede them. Al-Nan was a business family who established the Durra company in 1979 and was considered to be the biggest preserves producer and exporters in Syria. Family names not only positively represent a person's reputation, but also people who have these family names are instantly recognised as working in the fields of chemicals, textiles, detergents, and foods in Syria.²³⁸

Makhlūf, Sukkar, and Ḥamshū (mentioned previously) and al-Shihābi are the examples of family names that have a negative reputation. The al-Shihābi family established the Alpha medicines industry in 1990 and its products had the highest market share out of any other Syrian medicine company in Syria.²³⁹ These family names are well known for their alliances with the current Syrian regime. "Some of the people, when we heard their family name, we knew that they were totally the regime's cronies before the war. And we know that they listened to what the regime asked them to do. For these kinds of people, we automatically stay away from them and will never have any relations with them," said the Aleppo food industrialist no3.²⁴⁰

Syrian businessmen can understand another businessman's family history when it comes to family names; some can even be traced back to a businessman's grandfather's reputation and business. Not all businessmen personally know each other, however, they may consider taking further steps to having businesses with him

²³⁸ For Da'būl, al-Shā'ir, and Šabbāgh Sharabātī, please see page 16. Al-Nan, Durra, accessed March 12, 2017, <http://www.aldurra.com/about-us-extended/>, and "abraz 100 rajul a'māl Surī."

²³⁹ For Makhlūf, Sukkar, Ḥamshū, please see page 71; al-Shihābi, "abraz 100 rajul a'māl Surī."

²⁴⁰ Aleppo food industrialist no3, personal interview, Gaziantep, February 10, 2015.

or building up social connections. The Aleppan food industrialist no3 in his early 60s and was from the old bourgeoisie stated,

In Syria, when we hear another businessman's family name, it is not hard for us to guess or know about his family history, like in which field their family used to work. If the businessman's family history in doing business is honourable and they do not cheat, we respect these people. And if there was a chance to build up business partnerships or do business with them, we would have more confidence in doing so.²⁴¹

Even during fieldwork interviews, the importance of family names sometimes determined how smoothly the interview would be. For example, if I was introduced to a businessman with a reputable family name, the interviewees would usually treat me in a more polite way with a smile and might offer dessert.

In addition to family name, a businessman's city of origin might also be a factor regarding trust among Syrian businessmen. First, it is important to understand divisions based on region in Syria, an idea known as 'regional fragmentation.' Regional fragmentation among Syrians from different cities is not an unknown phenomenon. Pierret mentions this fragmentation regarding the Syrian ulama between Damascus and Aleppo in Syria.²⁴² However, this mentality not only exists in the minds of Syrian religious scholars, but also in the minds of Syrian businessmen. This is especially true when it comes to Damascene and Aleppan businessmen since both sides generally have negative stereotypes of one another. The Damascene detergent and chemical industrialist no1 complained that "the Aleppan businessmen are

²⁴¹ Aleppan food industrialist no3, personal interview, Gaziantep, February 10, 2015.

²⁴² Pierret, *Religion and State in Syria*, 13.

materialists and are not honest, they just think about money.”²⁴³ An Aleppan shoes industrialist no19 stated that “the Damascene businessmen are with the regime, and they use their nepotism to make money.”²⁴⁴ These stereotypes are widely known between the two parties.

The consequences of the mentality of fragmentation can, to a certain extent, be found in how Syrian businessmen interact with each other, especially in choosing a business partner. For instance, it was rare to find a Damascene businessman who had a business partner from Aleppo, and vice versa. Syrian businessmen from the same city were more comfortable making contact with the other businessmen from their own city since it was easier to trace the background of another businessman from the same city and would lower the chances of doing business with the wrong person. As a result, the interactions of the businessmen from the same city became closer and more intense. Choosing the right person to do business with could lower the possibility of future interactions with the official system, and this was something to avoid since they clearly understood how ineffective and unjust the judicial operations in the country were.

b. Philanthropic and political activities

Businessmen as pious, honest, audacious, and affectionate

²⁴³ Damascene detergent and chemical industrialist no1, personal interview, Gaziantep, January 28, 2015.

²⁴⁴ Aleppan shoes industrialist no19, personal interview, Gaziantep, June 02, 2014.

Syrian businessmen also contributed a large amount of social welfare to their fellow countrymen in the pre-revolution era, especially since the 1990s.²⁴⁵ In Arabic, the word for merchant is Tājir, which is composed of four Arabic alphabets – ta, 'alif, jim, and ra. These four letters are associated with four other words meaning pious (taqwā), honest (amīn), audacious (jarī'), and affectionate (raqīq) as explained by Damascene real estate investor no9.²⁴⁶ This association of the word 'merchant' (or businessman) is commonly known among the business community in Syria. For example, the Damascene real estate investor no9 whose family has a long history of working in trading activities mentioned that the traditional meaning of a real businessman was not to do with how successful his business activities were or how much money he earned, but rather, with the personality of how pious, honest, audacious and affectionate the businessman was.²⁴⁷

Forms of philanthropic activities could be demonstrated in different ways. Generally in Syria, there were organised groups such as charities for collecting donations and giving to the poor, or businessmen who individually donated money to people in need. The roots of these charitable activities can be traced back to the Ottoman Empire, though the charities started to become integrated into society under the French mandate. However, after the Ba'th party came into power in 1963, the charities were no longer welcome and were constrained by the state under the context of emergency

²⁴⁵ The number and scale of the Syrian charities have grown due to the weak economic and social situations. Soukaina Boukhaima, "Le Mouvement associatif en Syrie," in *Pouvoirs et associations dans le monde Arabe*, ed. Sarah Ben Nefissa (Paris, 2002), referenced by Thomas Pierret, "Sunni Clergy Politics in the Cities of Ba'thi Syria," in *Demystifying Syria*, ed. Fred Haley Lawson (London: Saqi, 2009) 77.

²⁴⁶ Damascene real estate investor no9, personal interview, Istanbul, December 15, 2014. See also the quote of Badr al-Din Shallah, the former president of the Damascus Chamber of Commerce, in Perthes, "A Look at Syria's Upper Class," 32.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

law.²⁴⁸ In the 1990s, the regime began to loosen its control of the operations of charitable associations in the country, which limitedly contributed to the growth of charities.²⁴⁹ Then between 2000 and 2009, the number of charities nearly tripled from 513 to 1485. Ruiz de Elvira Carrascal indicates the prosperity of charities during this period was probably due to motivations of the regime to gain funds and the support of powerful religious leaders.²⁵⁰

It is for other research to discuss the motivations of the regime for loosening the restrictions of charities; here it is important to emphasise the financial pillar of these charities: the Syrian businessmen. The Syrian businessmen during the pre-revolution era used to actively participate in philanthropic activities. Though they were not the only financial sponsors of these charities, some took administrative positions in these organisations. Some businessmen might also use these charitable activities as a mean to build up a positive image in the country.

In 2002, under the leadership of Shaykh Sariya al-Rifa'i, the Hifz al-Ni'ma (Preservation of Grace) was launched in Damascus.²⁵¹ According to a Damascene auto parts businessman no12, and whose uncle was still a member of this organisation, the origin of this charity was as follows:

A group of Syrian businessmen used to gather once a month, and one time they invited the Shaykh al-Rifa'i to join their gathering in a restaurant. But after the dinner, the Shaykh complained that the way they consumed the food was wasteful,

²⁴⁸ Laura Ruiz de Elvira, "State/Charities Relation in Syria. Between Reinforcement, Control and Coercion," in *Civil Society and the State in Syria. The Outsourcing of Social Responsibility*, Laura Ruiz de Elvira Carrascal and Tina Zintl, (Portland: Lynne Rienner, 2012).

²⁴⁹ Pierret and Kjetil Selvik, "Limits of "Authoritarian Upgrading"," 596, 598-601

²⁵⁰ Ruiz de Elvira, "State/Charities Relation in Syria," 15.

²⁵¹ Pierret and Kjetil Selvik, "Limits of "Authoritarian Upgrading"," 603.

and they shouldn't waste food. So they started to collect the left overs, asked the chef to recook it, and distributed it to the poor people. However, later on Rāmī Makhḷūf became the largest donor to the charity, and he used this as a way to control the operation of the charity.²⁵²

In 2009, Pierret explained that “Zayd-linked businesspeople were allowed to take control of the Union of Charitable Associations in Damascus, which co-ordinates and represents the city's charities.”²⁵³ Furthermore, the case of Hifz al-Ni'ma demonstrates that Syrian businessmen used to play important roles in these philanthropic activities, from providing funds and to administration. Meanwhile, some businessmen would use this philanthropic cover to enhance their social publicity within Syrian society. In addition to those Syrian businessmen who conducted charitable activities as a group or cooperated in charities, there were also many other Syrian businessmen who preferred to donate their money individually without a formal organisation. A Damascene packaging industrialist no13 said that, “we [Syrian businessmen] would attend a class in the mosque in the morning, and we would donate some money to a person, and then the person would go to other people (such as foreigners or poor people) and give the money to the one who was in need.”²⁵⁴

Striking a stone with an egg –Political Participation

In addition to economic and philanthropic activities, some Syrian businessmen have limitedly participated in political affairs prior to the 2011 revolution. During the French mandate period, the traditional petty bourgeoisie conducted strikes against

²⁵² Damascene auto parts businessman no12, personal interview, Cairo, November 10, 2015.

²⁵³ Pierret, “Sunni Clergy Politics,” 77.

²⁵⁴ Damascene packaging industrialist no13, personal interview, Amman, July 30, 2015.

French rule.²⁵⁵ After the Ba'th party came into power in 1963, the bourgeoisie conducted an investment strike in 1964.²⁵⁶ During the uprisings in the early 1980s, merchants in Aleppo also conducted a strike which quickly spread to other cities in Hama and Idlib.²⁵⁷ Nevertheless, in the early 1990s Perthes suggested that "...as a whole, the private sector in Syria is still politically weak."²⁵⁸ And in 2012, Haddad also argued that the mistrust between the Syrian regime and the businessmen reminds the latter that "the state will not allow them to acquire political positions (especially for urban-Sunni businessmen), act jointly outside the networks, or convert their economic wealth to political power."²⁵⁹ In addition, as mentioned previously, when Bashar al-Assad came to power in 2000, two businessmen who were members of the People Assembly (Riyāḍ Sayf and Ma'mūn al-Ḥumṣī) were imprisoned due to their outspoken criticism of the regime's politics.²⁶⁰ The strike and limited participation of Syrian businessmen in the People's Assembly indicate that the businessmen played a minor role in Syrian political history, where the political strengths of the businessmen are not considered influential to domestic politics. Even though the political environment under the rule of the Assad family was unwelcoming to businessmen's political activities, certain incidents that happened during the 20th and early 21st century show that Syrian businessmen were not absent from political participation at the political crossroads in Syria.

²⁵⁵ Khoury, "Syrian Urban Politics," 512,517,519, 525.

²⁵⁶ Perthes, *The Political Economy*, 38

²⁵⁷ Alasdair Drysdale, "The Asad Regime and Its Troubles," *MERIP Reports*, 110 (1982): 8.

²⁵⁸ Volker Perthes, "The Private Sector, Economic Liberalization, and the Prospects of Democratization: The Case of Syria and Some Other Arab Countries," in *Democracy without Democrats? The Renewal of Politics in the Muslim World*, ed. Ghassam Salame (London: I.B. Tauris, 1994) 257.

²⁵⁹ Haddad, *Business Networks in Syria*, 105.

²⁶⁰ See page 104.

The examples of political activities demonstrate how businessmen participated in political affairs in pre-revolution Syria, and their political participation can be categorised into two forms: conducting an economic strike; and being outspoken MPs. If their political behaviour and demands contradict the ruling power or threaten the regime's legitimacy, these political activities usually do not lead them to a good end since Syria was highly politically coercive. Even though Hafiz and Bashar both applied for and claimed economic openings and liberalisation, the limits were clear: the regime's authority could never be challenged, no matter what form or under which name. Thus, Syrian businessmen were taught to maintain a low-profile and keep their political opinions to themselves for the duration of the 40-year-rule of al-Assad family.

2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I first delineated the structure of the Syrian business community in the 20th century, and further categorised Syrian businessmen into four groups according to their relationship to the regime, which included, the ruling family, the crony, the strategic, and the independent businessmen. Second, I argued that Syrian businessmen used to conduct their activities cautiously and suspicious among each other due to corruption combined with nepotism, the legal insecurity that accompanies state interventions, and the lack of efficiency and opaqueness of the public sectors inside Syria. This behaviour further constrained the businessmen's activities in Syria, regardless of their economic investments, philanthropic activities, or political participation. Nevertheless, in order to improve trust among the business networks and facilitate businesses, businessmen developed specific informal mechanisms

regarding financial or judicial issues, such as the non-interest loans and the informal arbitrations. Also, the importance of social roots was the critical factor for strengthening trust among the Syrian businessmen, especially family names and cities of origin.

The Syrian businessmen not only actively worked in the field of economic activities prior to the year of 2011 inside Syria, but they also provided important contributions to the charities and limitedly participated in the political affairs. Nevertheless, the development of the business investments of the Syrian business community used to be strongly affected by the Assad regime prior to the 2011 revolution. Not only the economic investments of the Syrian businessmen were affected by the Assad regime, but also, their charitable or political activities were both under the influence of the Assad regime. Due to this former political economic environment inside Syria, which possessed the feature of corruption, legal insecurity, and lack of efficiency of the public sectors, I argue that the Syrian business networks used to be a fragmentation comprised of larger networks that did not trust each other and smaller networks with high levels of trust. That is to say, the former political economic environment made the Syrian businessmen to be cautious and suspicious while interacting with each other in general, because they were lack of trust with the regime and the institutions inside the country. Nevertheless, Syrian businessmen who they already have enough trust with each other because of long periods of friendships or could made sure the other Syrian businessmen were trustworthy, in this case, the trust among them may be high.

After examining the Syrian business community in the pre-revolution era, it is important to analyse the period between the eruption of the 2011 revolution and the time when businessmen decided to leave Syria, to determine how the transformation of the Syrian business community was sparked.

Chapter 3 From Revolution to Expatriation: the Reactions and Exodus of Syrian Businessmen

The Syrian economy started to be affected by the incidents in other Arab countries at the end of 2010 because people thought that the revolution would reach Syria soon. Then poverty started to spread inside the country. In the middle of 2011, many car companies closed, as well as real estate companies. The rich people started to become conservative with their businesses and not spend too much money. In October 2011, my company started to not sell anything, and then we started to feel the pressure because no one was making money.

- A Damascene technological company businessman no14²⁶¹

The Syrian business networks used to be fragmented due to the political economic environment inside Syria and from the study of the relationships between the Assad regime and its business community helps to categorise the pre-revolution Syrian businessmen into four different groups as shown in the last chapter. I now aim to examine the Syrian business community between the eruption of the 2011 revolution and the decisions of the businessmen to emigration from Syria to neighbouring countries.

First, the reactions of Syrian businessmen towards the 2011 revolution and the impact of the reactions on the unprecedented civil uprising will be analysed. Although the Syrian business community was generally considered not very political and held mutual ties with the Syrian regime, certain businessmen based in Syria who were less

²⁶¹ Damascene technological company businessman no14, personal interview, Amman, August 03, 2015.

dependent on the regime prior to 2011, broke their silence and played important roles in the revolution. The reasons that the less dependent Syrian businessmen supported the revolution were their long-term resentment and experiences of suppression by the regime, the habit of personalised philanthropic practices, moral shock from witnessing how the regime brutally repressed the civilian movement, and the political calculations of whether the Bashar regime would stay in power or not. Second, after the escalations of conflict in Syria, due to the lack of security, the worsening of the economic condition, and the political suppression, the businessmen had no choice but to flee Syria. Moreover, the waves of emigration are chronicled into three main periods: the beginning of 2011, between the mid-2012 and mid-2013, and the 30th June 2013.

The analysis of the Syrian business community between the period of the 2011 revolution and the moment they decided to leave will demonstrate that the harsher the regime suppressed its people during the revolution, the more the Syrian businessmen reacted and supported the people. Nevertheless, once the conflict reached a higher level of damage inside Syria, the lack of security, the worsening economic conditions and political suppressions, many Syrian businessmen had no choice but to leave Syria. This context of emigration of Syrian businessmen is different from previous business diaspora studies because Syrian businessmen were forced to leave their homeland while in other studies of business diasporas, the emigrants were driven by economic interest.²⁶²

²⁶² Hourani, "Lebanese Diaspora and Homeland Relations"; Lem, "Mobilization and Disengagement"; Tung and Chung, "Diaspora and Trade Facilitation"; Stel, *Diaspora versus Refugee*.

The political participation of Syrian businessmen who had left Syria before the 2011 revolution but participated in and supported the uprising - such as Ayman Asfari, and Muṣṭafā Ṣabbāgh - will be examined later in chapter 6.

3.1 The eruption of the revolution

Although many studies have been done on the 2011 Syrian revolution, the role of the Syrian business community during this unprecedented event has rarely been discussed.²⁶³ It is common to assume that most Syrian businessmen preferred to maintain low-profiles during the beginning of the 2011 revolution in Syria due to the economic profits associated with a stable political environment.²⁶⁴ On the surface, the Syrian business community seemed to maintain calm and not react during the uprising.²⁶⁵ And even though the majority of the Syrian businessmen did not react to the civil uprising, I will demonstrate that some Syrian businessmen secretly and actively did participate starting at the beginning of 2011. And with the escalation of

²⁶³ Reinoud Leenders, "Collective Action and Mobilization in Dar'a: An Anatomy of the Onset of Syria's Popular Uprising," *Mobilization: An International Quarterly*, 17, no.4 (2012); Reinoud Leenders and Steven Heydemann, "Popular Mobilization in Syria: Opportunity and Threat, and the Social Networks of the Early Risers," *Mediterranean Politics*, 17, no. 2 (2012); Reinoud Leenders, "Social Movement Theory and the Onset of the Popular Uprising in Syria," *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 35, no. 3, (2013); Alexander De Juan and Andre' Bank, "The Ba'athist Blackout? Selective Goods Provision and Political Violence in the Syrian Civil War," *Journal of Peace Research*, 52, no.1 (2015); Peter Seeberg, "The EU and the Syrian Crisis: The Use of Sanctions and the Regime's Strategy for Survival," *Mediterranean Politics*, 20, no.1 (2015); Christopher Phillips, *The Battle for Syria: International Rivalry in the New Middle East* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016); Samer Abboud, "Conflict, Governance, and Decentralized Authority in Syria," in *The Levant in Turmoil: Syria, Palestine, and the Transformation of Middle Eastern Politics*, ed. Martin Beck, Dietrich Jung, and Peter Seeberg (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Wendy Pearlman, "Moral Identity and Protest Cascades in Syria," *British Journal of Political Science* (2016).

²⁶⁴ Randa Slim, "Where's Syria's Business Community?" *Foreign Policy*, August 5, 2011, accessed March 14, 2017, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2011/08/05/wheres-syrias-business-community/>; Bassam Haddad, "The Syrian Regime's Business Backbone."

²⁶⁵ Neil MacFarquhar and Nada Bakri, "Isolating Syria, Arab League Imposes Broad Sanctions," *The New York Times*, November 27, 2011, accessed March 14, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/28/world/middleeast/arab-league-prepares-to-vote-on-syrian-sanctions.html>.

conflict, more and more businessmen decided to partake in the revolutionary campaign against the regime.

Based on the categorisation of the Syrian businessmen provided in the previous chapter (ruling family, crony, strategic, and independent), I will first illustrate how these four groups reacted differently towards the revolution. Looking into the businessmen's reactions in a chronological timeline will demonstrate how some businessmen reacted towards the revolution primarily from a politically conservative position, but still being somewhat personally against the revolution while providing material support. Furthermore, since at the beginning of the revolution all civilian's actions were mostly self-motivated and they did not have any substantial funds or aid from abroad, the participation of some businessmen from various business scales and different cities – including some business tycoons – had without a doubt a positive effect on the continuation of the revolution, despite the ruling family businessmen and crony businessmen remaining on the side of the regime and the other businessmen staying silent as before.

a. General reactions of the Syrian businessmen

If we [the businessmen] hadn't supported the people during the revolution, then the revolution could not have continued. No one helped us in the beginning. It was us [the Syrians] who were helping ourselves. Most businessmen did provide help to the revolution, whether financially or humanitarially. In each area, there's a food distribution centre or field hospital (mushfā al-maydānī) organization which is

funded by the local businessmen. Even some expatriate Syrian businessmen in Europe donate money to us to support the revolution.

- Lattakia automobile parts businessman no1²⁶⁶

The Syrian business community's reaction to the revolution can generally be divided into two groups: the businessmen who were not supporting the revolution and the businessmen who were supporting the revolution. The categorisation of Syrian businessmen provided in the previous chapter categorise the Syrian businessmen into four groups was based on the nature of the relationships between the regime and the businessmen. These groups of businessmen also reacted towards the civil uprising differently.

On the one hand, businessmen who did not support the revolution were mainly the ruling family businessmen and the crony businessmen since the members of the former group had their familial ties or business fortunes originating or extending from the regime itself, and the latter group had their economic wealth patronised mainly by the regime. They were supporters of the regime who rarely took any action against the regime and stood with the regime, with the exception Firās Ṭallās who left Syria in 2012. For the most part, they remained in Syria within the areas controlled by the regime. Some pro-regime business figures inside Syria spoke out in accordance with the regime's political stance and condemned the 'terrorist attack' inside the country, such as Fāris al-Shihābi, the president of the Federation of Syrian Chambers of Industry. He attributed the damages in the industrial area of Aleppo to a terrorist armed attack and theft with assistance from the Turkish government, "we have

²⁶⁶ Lattakia automobile parts businessman no1, personal interview, Istanbul, March 5, 2015.

conclusive evidence to prove the involvement of the Turkish government of stealing the assembly lines and machines [and] hundreds of factories from Aleppo.”²⁶⁷

Furthermore, many pro-regime business figures, such as Mazen al-Tabba, Tarif Akhras, Ra’if Al-Quwatly, Mohamed Hamcho, Rami Makhoul, Samir Hassan, and Khalid Qaddur were listed on Western sanction lists which was an attempt to prevent them from continually supporting the regime during the civil uprising.²⁶⁸ The sanctions from the Western countries deterred Syrian businessmen, to a certain extent, from allying with the Bashar regime or publicly showing their loyalties.²⁶⁹ This is why there were not many news reports showing the support of businessmen for the regime, except those who were already known for their support and were listed on the sanction lists. Nonetheless, the number of ruling family businessmen or crony businessmen was significantly less than the other two groups. At best, the businessmen who supported the regime would only leave Syria with the acceleration of conflict, such as one prominent businessman from an old Aleppan family who was a close friend of Fāris al-Shihābi and preferred not to reveal his name.²⁷⁰

In addition, there were also other strategic and independent businessmen who did not take part in the anti-regime campaign. However, the businessmen in these two groups who did not partake in the revolution also did not support the regime like the ruling family businessmen or crony businessmen did. Rather, they remained self-proclaimed

²⁶⁷ “al-Shihābi: namtalik adilla qit’iyya tuthbit tawarruṭ al-ḥukūma al-Turkiyya bi-sariqat khuṭūṭ intāj wa-ālāt mi’āt al-ma’āmil min Ḥalab.” [al-Shihābi: We have conclusive evidence proving the involvement of the Turkish government in stealing the production lines and machines of hundreds of factories from Aleppo], *General Organization of Radio and TV – Syria*, January 16, 2013, accessed March 14, 2017, <http://www.rtv.gov.sy/index.php/index.php?d=21&id=111833>.

²⁶⁸ Syria, *Sanctions WIKI*, accessed March 14, 2017, <http://www.sanctionswiki.org/Syria>.

²⁶⁹ Hugh Macleod, Syria: The Sanctions Effect, *GlobalPost*, September 30, 2011, accessed March 15, 2017, <http://www.pri.org/stories/2011-09-30/syria-sanctions-effect>.

²⁷⁰ Aleppan textile industrialist no22, personal interview, Cairo, November 17, 2015.

neutral. Since their relationships with the regime were based on the calculation of their business interests, they chose to remain 'as usual' as before the revolution.

On the other hand, the businessmen who did support the revolution were primarily from the other two groups, the strategic and independent businessmen. Since their relationships with the regime were not totally reliant on the regime's patronage, and many were furious with or had been personally affected by the regime's reactions to civilians, some businessmen in these two groups decided to take part and support the revolution. They supported the revolution with financial support, humanitarian aid, and information exchange. They did this voluntarily since they did not agree with what the regime was doing to the people, and their reactions during the revolution were agitated by the cruel repressions from the regime on its people.

Since it is already clear why pro-regime Syrian businessmen to support the regime or remain silence during the civil uprising, it is important to examine how the anti-regime businessmen took action and developed under the rule of the authoritative regime.

b. Growth of anger

Some businessmen supported the regime, and they were big, rich businessmen. Others were afraid that they would lose their country. And some felt that they needed a regime change, since the regime was killing its own people mercilessly. But they were afraid.

- A Damascene detergent and chemical industrialist no2²⁷¹

The Syrian business community has never been absent from participating in the revolution since it began in 2011. The dynamics of the Syrian business community can be seen in al-Ḥarīqa protest that happened a month prior to the Daraa protest.²⁷² Before the revolution, the al-Ḥarīqa market in Damascus had already experienced some tension between local merchants and officials. On 17 February 2011, local police arrested the son of a merchant, ‘Imād Nasab, from the al-Ḥarīqa market and beat him.²⁷³ The outcome of this arrest was that thousands of local people from the area gathered to express their grievances about how the police treated citizens and chanted the slogan, “the Syrian people will not be humiliated.”²⁷⁴ The Minister of Interior later came to the crowd and promised to punish the police.²⁷⁵ This event was the first reaction on the part of the Syrian business community regarding the regime’s unjust treatment of its people. On 18 March 2011, the people of Daraa walked on the streets in response to the regime’s security force detaining and torturing fifteen

²⁷¹ Damascene detergent and chemical industrialist no2, personal interview, Amman, June 19, 2015.

²⁷² al-Ḥarīqa Market, located behind the al-Hamidiya Market, especially for selling fabrics, “aswāq madīnat Dimashq al-qadīma -2-,” [Old Damascus city markets -2-], accessed March 14, 2017, http://www.naseemalsham.com/ar/Pages.php?page=readTourism&pg_id=32718. And has around 3000 to 4000 businessmen in this market, “sūq al-Ḥarīqa,” [al-Ḥarīqa market], July 6, 2014, accessed March 14,

2017, <http://www.olddamas.com/%D8%B3%D9%88%D9%82-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%82%D8%A9/>.

²⁷³ BBC, “Dimashq: tazāhara ba’d i’tidā al-shurṭa ‘ala shāb bi-al-ḍarb,” [Damascus: Demonstration after police assault on a young man] February 18, 2011, accessed March 17, 2017, http://www.bbc.com/arabic/middleeast/2011/02/110218_syria_demo.shtml.

²⁷⁴ “Popular Protest in North Africa and the Middle East (VI): The Syrian People’s Slow-motion Revolution,” *International Crisis Group* (July 6, 2011) 9, 10.

²⁷⁵ Ibid. 10; “al-Ḥarīqa...ūlā irhāṣāt al-ḥurriyya fī Sūrīyā,” [al-Ḥarīqa...first harbingers of freedom in Syria] Orient-News, February 17, 2016, accessed March 14, 2017. http://orient-news.net/ar/news_show/103246/0/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%82%D8%A9-%D8%A3%D9%88%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A5%D8%B1%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7.

schoolchildren.²⁷⁶ However, as the International Crisis Group's report stated, "security services brutal and often erratic performance has created more problems than it has solved, as violence almost certainly has been the primary reason behind the protest movement's growth and radicalization."²⁷⁷ The regime's merciless suppression of the protestors outraged the people.

With the escalation of casualties, the participation of the Syrian businessmen in the revolution became more active and obvious. A chronological analysis will indicate the ups and downs of the participation of Syrian businessmen during this period in three major phases: at the beginning, Syrian businessmen mostly stayed calm and considered whether it was the right time to get involved or not. Involvement during this period was still low. Then, after witnessing a series of massacres by the regime on its people and predicting that the regime would soon end, between mid-2011 and mid-2012 the support of the business community to the opposition rose. Various degrees of conflict within Syria also led businessmen in different cities to react differently, since it was not until mid-2012 that Aleppo witnessed large scale clashes between the regime and the rebels.²⁷⁸ Finally, after mid-2012, when it was no longer possible to continue residing in Syria, they decided to flee for their lives.

First Phase: preserving (beginning of 2011)

18th of March 2011 –Daraa protest

²⁷⁶ "Syria: Government Crackdown Leads to Protester Deaths," *Human Rights Watch news release*, March 21, 2011, accessed March 14, 2017,

<http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2011/03/21/syria-government-crackdown-leads-protester-deaths>.

²⁷⁷ "Popular Protest in North Africa," *International Crisis Group*, i.

²⁷⁸ Aleppo Conflict Timeline – 2012, *The Aleppo Project*, accessed April 22, 2017, <http://www.thealeppoproject.com/aleppo-conflict-timeline-2012/>.

When people walked on the streets of Daraa calling for the regime to make reforms, what they received was not a rational conversation. Instead, local authorities arrested, tortured and shot protestors. The regime's coercive repression on unarmed citizens angered the local community, which quickly spread to other major cities in the country. Different series of protests were common during this period. Nevertheless, the regime did not adjust its way of reacting to the people's demands. Many reports state that most Syrian businessmen were more politically conservative towards this uprising, or staying on the side of the Syrian Bashar regime.²⁷⁹ Many were hesitant to choose sides or oppose the uprising at the beginning of the revolution since they believed that the regime might win as it had done previously and they might be rewarded for their support. "We saw what happened in Hama and in Aleppo during the 1980s uprising; it was a total disaster. The regime has no mercy for its people, and we know that they will not hesitate to do anything to preserve their political power as before," stated the Aleppan automobile industrialist no21 in his sixties, who had witnessed the Hafiz al-Assad regime's brutal ways of repressions against the dissidents in Aleppo in 1982.²⁸⁰ However, some businessmen reportedly played a double game during this period, as they also funded the opposition should the regime eventually lose.²⁸¹ The Damascene technological company no14 businessman who

²⁷⁹ "Under Sectarian Surface, Sunni Backing Props Up Assad Regime," *Syria: direct*, June 20, 2013, accessed March 14, 2017, <http://syriadirect.org/news/under-sectarian-surface-sunni-backing-props-up-assad-regime/>; Sam Dagher, "Assad's Not-So-Secret Weapon: Loyal Syrian Businessmen," *The Wall Street Journal*, May 24, 2013, accessed March 14, 2017, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424127887323528404578453043883699474>; Haddad, "The Syrian Regime's Business Backbone;" George Baghdadi, "Syria's Assad Bolstered by Huge Show of Support," *CBS NEWS*, October 12, 2011, accessed March 14, 2017, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/syrias-assad-bolstered-by-huge-show-of-support/>.

²⁸⁰ Aleppan automobile industrialist no21, personal interview, Mersin, February 04, 2015.

²⁸¹ Christopher Phillips, "Syria's Bloody Arab Spring," LSE IDEAS: After the Arab Spring: Power Shift in the Middle East? London School of Economics and Political Science (2012) 39; Ziad Ghosn, Exodus of Businessmen From Syria, *Alakhbar*, February 5, 2014, accessed March 14, 2017, <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/18527>.

was in his early thirties from a Damascene printing industrial family explained how he personally took part in the protest in Dārayya in the beginning of 2011,

I decided to walk on the street, and I participated in the demonstration in Dārayya in the beginning of 2011. More than 100 people were arrested at check points, and some people were even tortured to death. The government did not allow their family members to ask where their missing relatives were, or the government would imprison them, too. There are also other youths who were from a business family like me. What we want is a clean country, a reformed regime without corruption.²⁸²

In addition, another six interviewees also stated that they participated in the protests in the city where they resided. Among them, four were from Aleppo, one from Lattakia, and one from Homs.²⁸³

Non-Governmental Organisation

Even though the regime responded to the protestors with cold-blooded repression, the Syrian people did not surrender. Some businessmen also set up non-governmental organisations of their own accord attempting to help the protestors whose personal safeties were severely affected by the regime's assaults. For example, in April 2011 in Aleppo, the second largest city in Syria, some businessmen gathered with other local intellectuals and established the organisation 'Appeal from Aleppo for the country' (nidā' min Ḥalab li-ajal al-waṭan), which not only issued a petition to president Bashar al-Assad demonstrating their pain and sorrow regarding the conflict in Daraa, Homs, and Bānyās and a desire for a non-division of Syria despite its different sects,

²⁸² Damascene technological company businessman no14, personal interview, Amman, August 03, 2015.

²⁸³ Interviews.

they also devoted themselves to saving or helping the protestors who were imprisoned by the Syrian regime and the patients who were injured during the protests.²⁸⁴ The Aleppan dessert industrialist no15 who was also a founding member of this organisation stated that,

We established an organisation called ‘Appeal from Aleppo for the country’ in April 2011 in Aleppo. The aim of this organization is to provide humanitarian aid to the local people. We also try to free people from prison, we negotiate with the local authority, and protect the patients inside the hospital from the regime’s harassment. Because once a protestor is injured and sent to the public hospital, the regime may send people to assassinate or arrest him.²⁸⁵

Second Phase: active participation (mid-2011 to mid-2012)

Arm the rebels and supply the protestors

Homs also experienced widespread anti-regime movements by the local people. Those in the ‘capital of the revolution’ – as Syrians described the city of Homs – started to arm themselves and fight for their freedom after the regime sent tanks to the city in mid-2011.²⁸⁶ “I even bought weapons for the people, I supported them,” stated a Homs food industrialist no2, who was from an old and well-known family in Homs, and had a positive reputation among other Homs interviewees. He further explained that,

²⁸⁴ “‘nidā’ min Ḥalab li-ajal al-waṭan,” [Appeal from Aleppo for the country] *All4Syria*, April 14, 2011, accessed April 14, 2017, <http://www.all4syria.info/Archive/3445>.

²⁸⁵ Aleppan dessert industrialist no15, personal interview, Gaziantep, January 02, 2015.

²⁸⁶ “Homs: Syrian Revolution’s Fallen ‘Capital’,” *BBC*, December 9, 2015, accessed March 14, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-15625642>.

There are many unjust things in Syria; the regime is corrupt, as everyone knows. But it is not only corrupt, it also against our religion. In 2010, the government sent people to my factory and investigated me. They asked me, why do you have a mosque in your factory? Isn't this ridiculous? We are Muslims, and the government tries to prohibit us from practicing our religion.²⁸⁷

The rebels purchased weapons with the funds they received from the inner and expatriate Syrian businessmen, as reported by journalist Nir Rosen when he stated that "Much of the financing comes from Syrian businessmen inside or outside the country."²⁸⁸

In addition, almost all the 191 businessmen interviewed stated that they provided money or food to the people who were in need during the first few months of the revolution. The Homs electronic goods businessman no1 stated that before the revolution his capital had reached \$2 million. When the revolution erupted in the country, he personally donated \$400,000 to buy food for the protestors and the needy people, "because when the people are going to streets to protest, they do not have time for work and have no salaries, and many people lost their family members who used to be the breadwinners in the families. We need to support them."²⁸⁹ News reports also state that Syrian businessmen were "opting to donate money, food and medical supplies covertly or grant time off to protesters."²⁹⁰

29th of July 2011 - The Emergence of the Free Syria Army

²⁸⁷ Homs food industrialist no2, personal interview, Gaziantep, March 10, 2015.

²⁸⁸ Q&A: Nir Rosen on Syria's Armed Opposition: Journalist who Recently Spent Time with Fighters Says There is no Central Leadership to the Armed Resistance, *Al-Jazeera*, February 13, 2012, accessed March 15, 2017 <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2012/02/201221315020166516.html>.

²⁸⁹ Homs electronic goods businessman no1, personal interview, Gaziantep, May 30, 2014.

²⁹⁰ Nour Ali, "Syrian Businessmen Signal Revulsion with President Assad's Regime," *Guardian*, August 28, 2011, accessed March 15, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/aug/28/syria-business-dissatisfaction-president-assad>.

On 29 July 2011, seven defected Syrian military officers released video footage on YouTube and announced the formation of the Free Syria Army (FSA), whose goal was to topple the Syrian regime and protect the revolution.²⁹¹ Numerous defectors from the Syrian Army to the FSA emerged in the following month.²⁹² Some rich Syrian businessmen also donated their money to support the FSA.²⁹³ Because of their long-term dread of the regime's rule, they thought the FSA could topple the 40-year rule of the house of al-Assad. "Syria is under unjust leadership and without human rights since Hafiz al-Assad; if we do not stand up against them, we are part of them," stated a Damascene clothes industrialist no15 in his fifties and used to have a shop in al-Ḥamiydiyya market.²⁹⁴ Before the revolution, the Syrian businessmen needed to personally know a few official figures from the government to facilitate their businesses administrative work. However, after the revolution erupted, these connections could be used by the anti-regime businessmen to transfer strategic information from the *mukhabarat* or military generals to the protestors. The same Damascene businessman further explained how he used this connection for helping the FSA,

²⁹¹ "i' lān tashkīl al-jaysh al-Sūrī al-ḥurr," [Announcement of the formation of the Free Syrian Army], *Youtube*, July 29, 2011, accessed March 15, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SZcCbIPM37w>.

²⁹² Liz Sly, "In Syria, Defectors form Dissident Army in Sign Uprising may be Entering New Phase," *The Washington Post*, September 25, 2011, accessed March 15, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/in-syria-defectors-form-dissident-army-in-sign-uprising-may-be-entering-new-phase/2011/09/24/gIQAKeF8wK_story.html?utm_term=.466b288c9502.

²⁹³ "man huwa al-jaysh al-sūrī al-ḥurr," [Who is the Free Syrian Army] *Observers.france24*, August 10, 2012, accessed March 15, 2017, <http://observers.france24.com/ar/20120810-%D9%85%D9%86-%D9%87%D9%88-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%B4-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B1-%D9%83%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%A8-%D9%84%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%88%D9%82-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%AD%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%B5-%D8%AD%D9%84%D8%A8-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D8%A8%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B3%D8%AF>.

²⁹⁴ Damascene clothes industrialist no15, personal interview, Istanbul, December 10, 2014.

I used to know some people from the *mukhabarat*. In the middle of 2011, while I was sitting with them, I knew what they were going to do to the protestors, where they were going to show up. Then I would pass this information to my son because he had connections with people from the FSA. After the *mukhabarat* learned what I was doing, I became wanted and I fled Syria.²⁹⁵

With the exception of the regime and crony businessmen, most Syrian businessmen had this long-term dread of the regime, and some expected that the emergence of the revolution and the armed rebels change the country. As such, they secretly provided materials to help the people. The young Damascene technological company businessman no14 who participated in the Dārayya protest explained how they gathered money and bought light weapons for the rebels,

In every area, Syrian businessmen would gather together to donate and collect money. Of course, this needed to be in secret. They used this money to buy food, basic needs, and banners to distribute to the protestors. They contacted each other by phone, and they used some secret code to make sure the road was safe for transporting the goods. Some businessmen were imprisoned or tortured to death after the regime caught them participating in these protests. When the Free Syria Army (FSA) emerged, many Syrian businessmen also bought weapons for the rebels. We bought weapons for the rebels, but they were light weapons, like \$2000 for a gun. We bought it either from the black market at the Syrian-Lebanese borders, or from the State Security. The people from the State Security would sell us bullets, and even high-ranking officers inside the government would sell weapons to us. They do not care about who stays in power, rather, they merely cared about their pockets. Then we transported these bullets to Homs.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Damascene technological company businessman no14, personal interview, Amman, August 03, 2015.

Also, another Damascene household cleansing industrialist no31 from the rural Damascus set up a restaurant in the mid-end of 2011 for providing meals for the rebels. “My father opened a big restaurant in our hometown. That time, everyday around 5000 rebel fighters would come to the restaurant and have food then go fight the regime,” stated the son of this industrialist.²⁹⁷

This anti-regime financial support from the Syrian business community was found in other major cities in Syria, as confirmed by interviewed businessmen who were from Homs, Hama, Aleppo, Daraa, Latakia, and Tartus during the revolution period. Nevertheless, it was not until mid-2012 that the second biggest city in Syria – Aleppo – experienced escalated protests and conflicts as other major cities. Thus, before mid-2012 there were not as many as Aleppan businessmen participating in the revolution as the other major Syrian cities.

11th of December 2011-Dignity Strike

On 11 December 2011, Syrian activists attempted to initiate a nation-wide ‘dignity strike,’ which called upon all workers, students, and businessmen in Syria to join. Many shops owners also responded to this strike, like one who said “in Homs, al-Zabadāni, and Aleppo, the shops are closed and the streets are empty.”²⁹⁸ Areas inside the cities of al-Qābūn, Jawbar, Barza, Kafarsūsa experienced different degrees

²⁹⁷ Son of the Damascene household cleansing industrialist no31, personal interview, Istanbul, February 3, 2015.

²⁹⁸ “bad’ “iḍrāb al-karāma” fī Sūrīyā,” [Start “a strike of dignity” in Syria] *al-Jazeera*, December 11, 2011, accessed March 15, 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.net/news/arabic/2011/12/11/%D8%A8%D8%AF%D8%A1-%D8%A5%D8%B6%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7>.

of market shut down, as did the rural side of Damascus of Zamlaka, Kafarbatna, Dārayya.²⁹⁹ The day after the dignity strike, the Syrian national news refuted that the people were behind it, but that the terrorists were the ones who organised the strike.”³⁰⁰ The strike also angered the regime and the security forces from the government ordered these merchants who had already closed their shops to reopen them. The security forces also reacted violently by smashing the shops’ doors of the merchants who refused to obey their demands.³⁰¹

Early to mid-2012 – Escalation of Repression

The situation in Syria was getting worse day by day. As stated by the International Crisis Group’s report in April 2012, the attacks and repression by the regime were

²⁹⁹ “tansīqiyya al-Qābūn - idrāb al-karāma fī al-Qābūn j2,” [Coordinating al-Qābūn - dignity strike in al-Qābūn, part 2] *Youtube*, December 11, 2011, accessed March 15, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tSv_QDaOLfs&feature=share; “idrāb al-karāma fī aswāq Jawbar Dimashq 11 12 juz’ 1,” [Dignity strike in Jawbar markets Damascus 11 12 part 1] *Youtube*, December 11, 2011, accessed March 15, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c6fFdhGG0zQ>; “idrāb al-‘āšima Dimashq Barza 11-12-2011,” [Strike capital Damascus Barza 11-12-2011] *Youtube*, December 11, 2011, accessed March 15, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NncFzEMqfNQ&feature=youtu.be>; “Zamlaka rīf Dimashq 11 12 idrāb kāmīl li-l-mahāll al-tijāriyya,” [Zamlaka Damascus countryside 11 12 the whole strike of business shops] *Youtube*, December 11, 2011, accessed March 15, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rK_E4mMFvL0&feature=youtu.be; “idrāb fī madīnat Kafarbatna 11-12-2011,” [Strike in the Kafarbatna city 11-12-2011] *Youtube*, December 11, 2011, accessed March 15, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r77qgAyav1Q&feature=youtu.be>; “Dārayya-istijābat al-ahālī li-idrāb al-karāma 11-12-2011,” [Dārayya - locals response to dignity strike 11-12-2011 c 2] *Youtube*, December 11, 2011, accessed March 15, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u1ZAZzxPYhk>.

³⁰⁰ Khaldūn al-Zaghīr, “Sūrīyā fī mu‘taqal al-Ba‘th/ al-Asad - qiṣṣat waṭan (2),” [Syria in the detention of the Ba‘ath / Al-Asad - the story of a homeland (2)] *Souriahouria*, April 28, 2012, accessed March 17, 2017, <https://souriahouria.com/%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%AA%D9%82%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%B9%D8%AB%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B3%D8%AF-%D9%82%D8%B5%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%B7%D9%86-2/>.

³⁰¹ «idrāb al-karāma» yaṣīl ilā qalb Dimashq,” [«Dignity Strike» reach the heart of Damascus] *Aawsat*, December 12, 2011, accessed March 15, 2017, <http://archive.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&article=653881&issueno=12067#.WMkg6zuGM2x>.

dramatically escalating at this time.³⁰² The regime mercilessly bombed Homs and other places with heavy artillery not only causing high numbers of casualties and thousands of internally displaced people, but it also enraged other Syrians who had witnessed the brutal killings. To help care for injured people, some Syrian businessmen donated money and established field hospitals inside residential houses or inconspicuous buildings. They bought medicine from corrupt officials in public sectors and sent it to these field hospitals. These field hospitals were found in all major cities in Syria after the conflict had been aggravated. In addition, some businessmen provided places to stay for those who were forced to leave their hometowns, even if accepting these people would get them in trouble with the regime. The regime considered those who were fleeing as ‘terrorists’ due to the strong revolutionary tendencies of their hometowns (especially people from Homs). A Damascene clothes industrialist no16 said,

At the end of 2011, I rented a complete two-star hotel in Damascus to let people who fled from Homs for Damascus to stay in. But the government was not happy with what I did. The government said that these people were all terrorists. Then the government sent intelligence to me and asked me why I did this. The official asked: how can you be sure that they are not terrorists?³⁰³

Humanitarian aid from the business community was found throughout Syria during the revolution. However, it is not possible to estimate the amount of these donations since all had to be done in secret.

³⁰² “Syria’s Phase of Radicalisation,” *International Crisis Group* (April 10, 2012) 2.

³⁰³ Damascene clothes industrialist no16, personal interview, Al-Obour, 15 November, 2015.

The participation of the businessmen in the civil uprising also received attention from the regime during this period. One businessman stated what he had heard from another businessman who had apparently participated in a meeting with Bashar al-Assad:

On 8 May, Bashar met with over 20 leading Sunni businessmen from the capital. He said that he had heard that some of them were supporting the revolution. He said that, if it was true, he was willing to do to [the historical commercial hubs of] Hamidiya and Madhat Pasha what he had done to Baba Amro. He wanted them to know that this would pose him no problem whatsoever.³⁰⁴

This quote indicates that the scale of the businessmen's participation in the revolution in Damascus had reached such an extent that the regime was attempting to impede the further growth of the businessmen's donations to the revolution and that it was threatening the businessmen to not take part in the revolution.

25th of May 2012 - al-Hūla Massacre

On 25 May 2012, 108 civilians were killed in al-Hūla, Homs, including 49 children and 34 women.³⁰⁵ This killing was described by the United Nations Security Council as an "outrageous use of force against the civilian population."³⁰⁶ The Syrians were furious by the images that they were seeing on social media; that is, the corpses of women and children.³⁰⁷ Two days after the massacre, the Damascene merchants went

³⁰⁴ "Syria's Mutating Conflict," *International Crisis Group* (August 1, 2012) 8.

³⁰⁵ UN Condemns Syria over Houla Massacre: Security Council Says the "Outrageous Use of Force" against Civilians Violated International Law, *Al-Jazeera*, May 28, 2012, accessed March 15, 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/05/2012527213720286129.html>.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ Richard Spencer, "Syria Plunges towards Civil War after Houla Massacre," *The Telegraph*, May 28, 2012, accessed March 17, 2017,

on strike against the regime's brutal killing of children in al-Ḥūla. According to eyewitnesses during this strike, 50 to 90% of the markets at al-Ḥamiydiyya, al-Ḥarīqa, al-Bazwariyya, Bāb Sariyja, Madḥat Bāshā, al-Ḥalabūnī, al-Khayyāṭīn, Ḥūsh Balās, and Bāb al-Jābiyya joined the strike.³⁰⁸ This was the first time since the 2011 revolution that merchants from the two most important trading centres in Damascus – al-Ḥamiydiyya and al-Ḥarīqa – took part in the strike against the regime.³⁰⁹ The strikes by the business community put economic pressure on the regime. By doing so, the Syrian economy was weakened during the strike, especially once the shop owners in the main markets of Syria started to take part. The strike sent a message of dissatisfaction from the business community to the regime, and as a consequence, put both minor and major economic pressure on the rulers. Nevertheless, the business

www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/9296335/Syria-plunges-towards-civil-war-after-Houla-massacre.html.

³⁰⁸ “iḍrāb ‘āmm yuṭāl aḥamm aswāq Dimashq tazāmunan ma’ wuṣūl ‘Annān,” [A general strike affects the most important Damascus markets to coincide with the arrival of Annan], *Alarabiya*, May, 28, 2012, accessed March 15, 2017, <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/05/28/217026.html>; al-Ḥamiydiyya: the most famous market in Damascus, which includes hundreds shops and sell products such as household goods, clothing, shoes, and food, “sūq al-Ḥamīdiyya,” [al-Ḥamiydiyya market], *Discover-syria*, accessed March 15, 2017, <http://www.discover-syria.com/bank/52>; al-Bazwariyya: one of the most important popular market in Damascus, selling different add-on, includes nuts, spices, and perfumes, “sūq al-Bazwariyya,” [al-Bazwariyya market] *Marefa*, accessed March 15, 2017 http://www.marefa.org/index.php/%D8%B3%D9%88%D9%82_%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%B2%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9; Bab Sarija and Bab al-Jabiya: especially sells fish, vegetables, chicken, and food products, “aswāq Dimashq bi-l-ism wa al-waṣf,” [Damascus markets by name and description] *Almosafr*, accessed March 15, 2017, <http://www.almosafr.com/forum/t24545.html>; Madḥat Bāshā market: one of the oldest market in old Damascus, especially sells textile products, golden men, scarves, silk fabrics, distinctive local industrial products, bed sheets, silk garment, towels, curtains, and some wholesales store, “sūq Madḥat Bāshā,” [Madḥat Bāshā market] *Marefa*, accessed March 15, 2017, http://www.marefa.org/index.php/%D8%B3%D9%88%D9%82_%D9%85%D8%AF%D8%AD%D8%AA_%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%A7; al-Halbouni: located in central Damascus, especially famous for selling school and office supplies, “«al-Ḥalabūnī min sūq li-l-warrāqīn ilā markaz li-tijāra al-mustalzamāt al-madrasīyya wa al-maktabīyya fī Dimashq”, [«al- Ḥalabūnī » from paper market to a center for trade school and office supplies in Damascus] *Aawsat*, October 25, 2009, accessed March 15, 2017, http://archive.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=67&article=541575&issueno=11289#.V-1Q_Ch942x; al-Khayyāṭīn: sells all kinds of fabrics, and is also the headquarters for the city's tailors, “sūq al-Khayyāṭīn,” [Tailors market] *Lovedamascus*, accessed March 15, 2017, <http://www.lovedamascus.com/ar/what-to-see/tourist-attractions/al-harika/005ta007/souq-al-khayateen>.

³⁰⁹ “iḍrāb ‘āmm yuṭāl aḥamm aswāq Dimashq tazāmunan ma’ wuṣūl ‘Annān.”

strike resulted in the regime's immediate suppression of the businessmen, as had the dignity strike in December 2011 as mentioned earlier, by using its security forces to force these shop owners to reopen their shops or destroy the ones who refused to obey the orders.³¹⁰

These activities demonstrate that the reactions of the Syrian businessmen who participated in anti-regime activities did contribute to the unprecedentedly large-scale uprising in Syria, and that their funding to a certain extent provided support to the protesters' daily life by helping the people whose lives were affected by the uprising. Except for the regime and crony businessmen, the remaining businessmen suffered from the unjust rulings of the government. This deepened the long-term resentment of businessmen towards the Assad regime. Since the political environment did not even allow them to express their fury about the regime's unfair governance, and since certain businessmen had been suppressed, the eruption of the massive uprising created an opportunity to react. In addition, none of the regime or crony Syrian businessmen participated in the revolution (except Firās Ṭallās who left Syria during the revolution). This indicates that the stronger the dependency between the regime and the businessmen was, the fewer possibilities they to revolt, and vice versa.

Furthermore, the Syrian businessmen would donate financial or material help to the needy people before the revolution, as previously discussed.³¹¹ In addition to the altruistic reason of Syrian businessmen for helping the needy people during the conflict, as soon as ordinary Syrians suffered from the conflict, the business class that used to help the poor, needed to show their sympathies to preserve their reputable

³¹⁰ Ibid.

³¹¹ See page 110-13.

standing in the country. Within the context of businessmen's long-term resentment of the regime, and the less dependency of Syrian businessmen on the regime, the habit of personalised philanthropic practices among the Syrian business community, witnessing the regime's merciless killing of its people during the revolution also provoked businessmen to support the people and the revolution. Especially after the political calculations of the fall of the Bashar regime became higher, the Syrian business community's support of the revolution became more prosperous.

However, after the middle of 2012, due to the deteriorating conditions inside Syria, most Syrian businessmen were forced to leave Syria. Since then, the participation of the Syrian businessmen in the revolution inside Syria has become less tangible. But their expatriation from Syria did not mean that they stopped engaging in the revolution. Rather, for some of them, their revolution continues in the host countries which they relocated into.

3.2 Timings and reasons of emigration

The turning points which drove Syrian businessmen to emigrate from Syria and the reasons behind their decisions to emigrate require attention. An analysis of interview data and online press suggests that there were three main periods with higher numbers of Syrian businessmen leaving the country starting at the beginning of the 2011 revolution. These three periods are:

- 1) The beginning of the 2011 revolution
- 2) Between mid-2012 and mid-2013

3) From the 30 June 2013

The first two periods include the emigration of businessmen from Syria, while the third is the date when businessmen emigrated from the first host country to a second host country, namely from Egypt to Turkey. During the period of conflict, Syrians left because of the severe conditions in the country, the lack of security being the most common reason as with other cases of forced migration. However, the reasons Syrian businessmen left Syria were not limited to the lack of security, but rather the worsening economic situation and the suppression of the political environment were another two factors which forced them to leave. Furthermore, the regime applied proactive strategies which attempted to deter and prevent the businessmen from joining the uprising, and further intimidated the businessmen who might have stood with the other side.

a. Chronological waves of business emigration

In September 2011, many foreign human resource agencies stopped sending workers to Syria. At that time it was still peaceful in Damascus, but all the foreign companies I used to do business with stopped doing business with us.

- A Damascene human resources businesswoman no17³¹²

As previously mentioned, the emigration of Syrian businessmen was massive, in terms of both large numbers of businessmen and the capital they took with them. To more easily understand the time frame of Syrian businessmen emigrations, the table

³¹² Damascene human resources businesswoman no17, personal interview, Amman, July 30, 2015.

3.1 below showing the leaving dates and the numbers businessmen leaving Syria uses the researcher's fieldwork data, which includes 160 interviewed informants. 31 informants did not mention their departure dates so they were excluded from the data. The column on the left indicates the numbers of businessmen, and the bottom column indicates the emigration dates. This table indicates that a high number of Syrian businessmen emigrated in two periods: in the early days of the uprising with roughly 10% of the interviewees leaving at this time, and a peak between mid-2012 and mid-2013.

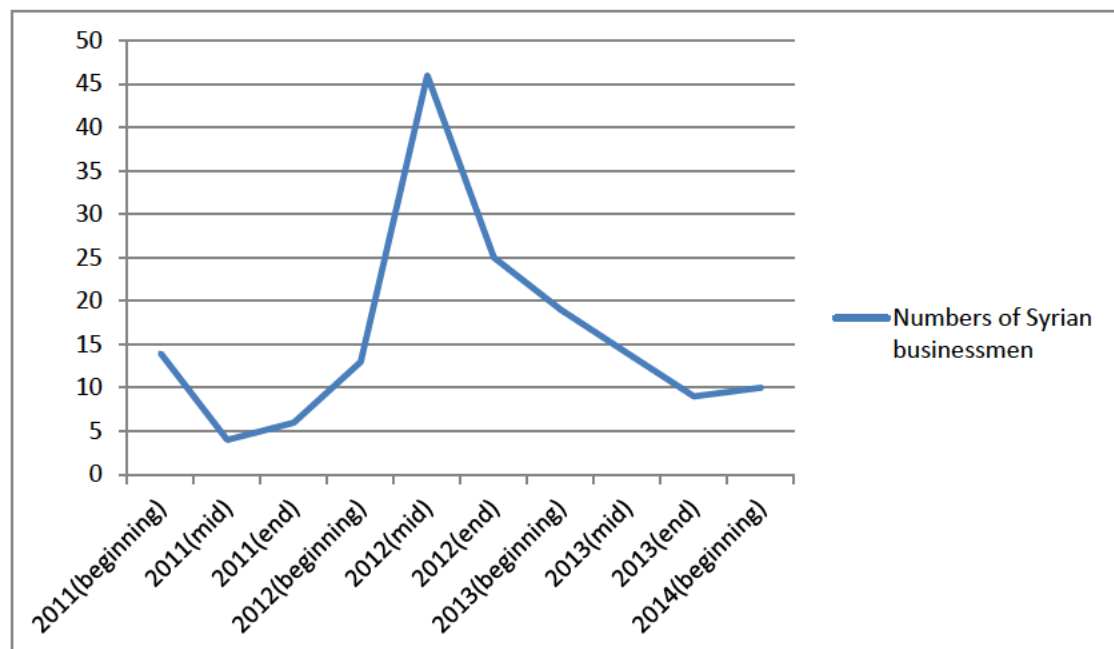


Table 3.1: numbers Syrian businessmen emigrants³¹³

Beginning of the 2011 revolution

In the first few months after the eruption of the Syrian revolution in March 2011, daily life for Syrians generally seemed normal, except in the cities of Daraa, Homs,

³¹³ The table is made from the researcher's interview data.

and Hama, which were receiving more suppression from the regime. However, this peace was merely a mirage since the first wave of emigration of Syrian businessmen had already started. According to one businesswoman quoted above, this emigration demonstrates that the human resources sector in Syria dealing with foreign companies had already been affected during the first few months of the Syrian uprising. Not only had the human resources sector been affected, but so had the sector of those who worked in international trade and tourism. A Damascene ceramic industrialist no18 who was a member of the Ceramic Industry Committee in Damascus Chamber of Industry and Rural Areas stated that,

When the incident started at the beginning of 2011, everything still seemed to be okay in Syria. Yet the foreign companies that we had businesses with began losing trust in our productive ability and the transportability of our goods. My foreign customers did not trust that I could continue exporting my goods so they stopped purchasing goods from us. Then I had to shut down my factory since there was no more business for me.³¹⁴

In addition, before the eruption of the revolution in Syria, some businessmen whose family members had been active in participating in political affairs (such as the Damascus Declaration) received *mukhabarat* visits because of their family's activities. "At the beginning of the revolution, the government sent their people to my family in order to investigate us [because of my family's history]. And we were all afraid to leave our house at that time. On 4 February 2011, I decided to go to Qatar first because I had family members there," said an Aleppan textile industrialist no23.³¹⁵ After the Daraa protest in March 2011, the regime made efforts to guarantee the loyalty of the business community. For instance, the Syrian tycoon1 who used to be

³¹⁴ Damascene ceramic industrialist no18, personal interview, Cairo, September 30, 2015.

³¹⁵ Aleppan textile industrialist no23, personal interview, Gaziantep, January 20, 2015.

the leading figure in one of the Syrian Chambers and was on the list of the top 100 prominent businessmen stated,

Rāmī Makhhlūf phoned me after the Daraa protest in March asking me my opinions on the matter and what I suggested to do. I told him that I thought peaceful talk would be the best way to solve the issue, but he was not happy with that. What he preferred to do was to shoot anybody who was against the regime. A few days later I went to the Aleppo airport because I needed to see my factory in another country. But the airline representative at the airport told me that my name was on a 'prohibited to travel' list [because of what I had said to Rāmī.] Then I fled to Turkey illegally.³¹⁶

Furthermore, the increase of checkpoints inside Syria and stricter security checks also made life difficult for businessmen. The regime started setting up checkpoints, and the State Security began issuing a new form of identity card called the 'security card.' The check points in Syria under the regime-controlled area usually had two lines, one for the people who had the security card, the other one for those who did not. People would need to pay \$2000 to get this card.³¹⁷ Security guards at the checkpoints usually would not interrogate people with cards very much. Moreover, some businessmen who passed through checkpoints at the beginning of 2011 were asked to sign a letter to declare that they would not participate in anti-regime activities. This annoyed businessmen who saw it as an insult and an example of distrust by the regime.

Finally, the outskirts of major Syrian cities were the first places where unrest was most prevalent since the regime had targeted the cities. Businessmen whose factories

³¹⁶ Syrian tycoon1 who used to be the leading figure in one of the Syrian Chambers, personal interview, Gaziantep, December 12, 2014.

³¹⁷ Damascene general trade businessman no19, personal interview, Istanbul, April 02, 2015.

were located in the outskirts were severely affected by the unstable situation. Not only were their factories at risk of being looted or destroyed by local gangs, but their personal safety was also at risk. The Aleppan textile industrialist no22 and was listed on the 2009 prominent businessmen list stated that,

A few months after the outbreak of the incident, my friend called me and told me to be careful because someone wanted to kidnap my son - because they knew that I was rich and that I only have one son. In mid-2011 someone called to threaten me so then I sent my son to Lebanon.³¹⁸

Mid-2012 to Mid-2013

In mid-2012, the battle between the Syrian regime's army and the opposition groups became critical. Especially in the two main cities of Damascus and Aleppo, the opposition groups advancing upon the regime forces there that the rebels took half of Aleppo and most of the suburbs of Damascus.³¹⁹ On 18 July 2012, the FSA bombed the capital city of Damascus, which killed the Defence Minister Dāwūd Rājiḥa, Deputy Defence Minister Āṣif Shawkat, and al-Assad's security adviser and assistant vice president Ḥassan Turkumāni.³²⁰ This attack by the opposition groups against the regime was considered as the harshest blow to the regime forces since the beginning of the rebel movement. In Aleppo in August 2012, the FSA also took over the biggest industrial area of Syria, the Shaykh Najjar, which had included 1,250 factories before the conflict.³²¹ However, the progress of the opposition movements in the battlefields

³¹⁸ Aleppan textile industrialist no22, personal interview, Cairo, November 17, 2015.

³¹⁹ Syria: Mapping the Conflict, *BBC*, July 10, 2015, accessed March 17, 2017, www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-22798391.

³²⁰ "Syria Conflict: Ministers 'Killed in Suicide Attack'," *BBC*, July 18, 2012, accessed March 15, 2017, www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-18882149.

³²¹ "ālāt ma'āmil Ḥalab wa-aṣḥābu-ha fī al-ḥarb," [Aleppo factories' machines and owners in war]

led to harsher reactions from the regime, conducted a series of indiscriminate bombings in the Shaykh Najjar area.³²² The regime's heavy attacks on the rebel occupied area caused great damage and many casualties.³²³ Businessmen's investments and properties were without a doubt heavily affected by these armed clashes. An Aleppo agency businessman no24 who was an agent for many international electronic companies recalled how his businesses were affected by the both the regime forces and the rebels,

One of my companies was occupied by the regime's forces because the officer told me that they needed my office to let the soldiers sleep in. And I heard that another one of my offices was turned into an Islamic court. That office had a 1500-meter square showroom and was occupied by the rebels. If the area was occupied by the regime then it should be comparatively safer than the one that was occupied by the rebels.³²⁴

Not only were the properties of the businessmen in danger, but so was their personal safety and the safety of their families. The Damascene detergent and chemical industrialist no2 stated that,

My father was in his eighties and he was kidnapped by an armed group in the middle of 2012. The kidnappers asked us to pay \$60,000 for the ransom or they would kill him, and we paid it. We were living in the area which was controlled by the regime, but even the regime said that they did not know who was behind this ransom [because the regime themselves did not know whether the kidnapping was conducted by their people or not] since everything was in chaos.³²⁵

Almalaf-sy, accessed January 5, 2016, http://www.almalaf-sy.com/article.php?id=4628#.Vow7G_mLTIU.

³²² "A Special Report on the Recent Air Attacks on Aleppo Potential Death Falling from the Sky...", *Violation Documentation Center in Syria*, March 2014, accessed March 17, 2017, www.vdc-sy.info/index.php/en/reports/1394885517#.WS33lWiGM2w.

³²³ Ibid.

³²⁴ Aleppo agency businessman no24, personal interview, Amman, August 01, 2015.

³²⁵ Damascene detergent and chemical industrialist no2, personal interview, Amman, June 19, 2015.

Furthermore, the expansion of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in the northern part of Syria in May 2013 onwards also negatively affected business for Syrian businessmen. Especially after 14 May 2013 when the ISIS started to dominate the city of Raqqa, then the conflict started again between the FSA and ISIS in the northeast of Syria.³²⁶ These armed clashes not only directly affected the activities of the Syrian businessmen whose businesses were located in the northern part of Syria, but also blockaded the transportation routes of goods for the Syrian businessmen who used to export their goods to Iraq via Raqqa.

30th of June 2013

In addition to these two periods, a third period, which cannot be seen from this table because it indicates a move from the first host country to the second, is 30 June 2013. This was when Syrian businessmen who had already fled Syria for Egypt decided to leave Egypt for other countries, primarily Turkey. 18 out of the 191 interviewees stated that they moved from Egypt to Turkey after the military coup in Egypt on 30 June 2013. Many other interviewees also reported that a number of their Syrian business colleagues left Egypt for Turkey after the incident in Egypt. On that date, protesters in Egypt demanded the resignation of Egyptian president Mohamed Morsi. The country then entered a state of chaos and the Minister of Defence Abdel Fattah al-Sisi later arranged a military coup.³²⁷ “We, as Syrians, were believed to be the

³²⁶ Firas al-Hakkar, “The Mysterious Fall of Raqqa, Syria’s Kandahar,” *Al-Akhbar*, November 8, 2013, accessed March 15, 2017, <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/17550>.

³²⁷ Amr Hamzawy, “The Tragedy of Egypt’s Stolen Revolution,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, January 25, 2017, accessed March 17, 2017, carnegieendowment.org/2017/01/25/tragedy-of-egypt-s-stolen-revolution-pub-67809.

supporters of president Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhoods by the local people, which led local Egyptians to start destroying our shops or robbing us on the streets. There was no safety for us in Egypt after the protest,” stated the Aleppan plastic industrialist no9 in Egypt who has a plastic factory in the 6th of October city with fifteen workers.³²⁸ Most Syrian businessmen in Egypt experienced threats and uncertainty at that time. This anti-Syrianness in Egypt could be observed from two Egyptian media sources, both television presenters. Tawfiq ‘Akāsha and Yūsuf al-Ḥusayni labeled the Egypt-based Syrians as supporters of the Muslim Brotherhoods and Muhammad Morsi.³²⁹ ‘Akāsha even threatened “to kill the Syrian refugees and burn and destroy their houses” in the programme.³³⁰ For many Egypt-based Syrian businessmen, 30 June 2013 became a turning point to leave the country due to the lack of safety.

b. Reasons for leaving

I was sitting in the salon watching my neighbour’s kids playing on the balcony. Suddenly, I heard gunshots and I went to check on the kids. All I saw were the dead bodies of the kids covered in blood. They had been shot dead by the regime’s snipers.

- A Damascene printing industrialist no20³³¹

³²⁸ Aleppan plastic industrialist no9, personal interview, 6th of October. October 13, 2015.

³²⁹ “Yūsuf al-Ḥusaynī li-l-lāji’īn al-Sūrīyīn,” [Yūsuf al-Ḥusaynī for Syrian refugees] *Youtube*, July 10, 2013, accessed March 15, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1twdC1DxbO4>.

³³⁰ “Tawfiq ‘Akāsha yuhaddid bi-qatl al-lāji’īn al-Sūrīyīn fī Miṣr wa-ḥarq manāzili-hum,” [Tawfiq ‘Akāsha threatens to kill the Syrian refugees in Egypt, and to burn of their homes] *Youtube*, July 15, 2013, accessed March 15, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EWZSIYAIPSU>.

³³¹ Damascene printing industrialist no20, personal interview, Amman, July 27, 2015.

The reason that Syrian businessmen left Syria was not merely due to the lack of safety which exacerbated the conflict, but also to the deterioration of the economy and the political suppression by the Syrian regime. Furthermore, decisions to leave Syria were made suddenly, since in most cases, there was no time for them to reconsider departing from the conflict zone or not.

During the conflict period, the businessmen were the conspicuous targets for all the armed groups, especially businessmen who had been big names in the Syrian market. These businessmen received direct threats from both the regime forces and the rebels, as well as other unknown opportunist armed gangs, with different incidents of assassinations, looting, and kidnappings happening to them once the conflict started. On 1 November 2011, Muḥammad al-Ways, a big Aleppan food industrialist who established his company in 1967 and had several industrial facilities in Idlib and Aleppo, was assassinated by an armed group because he refused to join the revolution

north-western Syrian city of Sarāqib.³³² The other well-known case of devastation towards the business community in the early phase of the uprising occurred on 7 December 2011. Olabi Text was a company run by the Aleppan textile tycoon Khālīd al-‘Ulabī, who was also a member of the People Assembly and an active member of the Aleppan Chamber of Industry and Federation of Syrian Chambers of Industry.³³³

³³² “iḡhtiyāl šinā’ī kabīr fī Ḥalab ‘alā yad musallaḥīn wa-jarah arba‘a bayna-hum shaqīqa-hu,” [A big industrialist assassinated in Aleppo by armed men and wounded four including his brother] *Syria-news*, November 1, 2011, accessed March 15, 2017, http://syria-news.com/readnews.php?sy_seq=139516; “‘asharāt al-musallaḥīn fataḥū ‘alā mawkabih al-nār,” [Dozens of gunmen opened fire on his convoy] *Aksalser*, November 1, 2011, accessed March 15, 2017, http://www.aksalsir.com/?page=view_articles&id=f4184d1142bef066b5dc7c9caa9c96e7.

³³³ “rajuḷ al-a‘māl Khālīd ‘Ulabī: rawātib kull lā‘ib min lā‘ib al-ittiḥād balaghat miliyūn,” [Businessman Khālīd ‘Ulabī: the salaries of every player from the players union reached a million] *Aliqtisadi*, July 1, 2011, accessed March 15, 2017, <https://sy.aliqtisadi.com/78502-%D8%B1%D8%AC%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B9>

His factory had more than 3,000 workers and hundreds of machines before the revolution. However, one of his factories that was worth 5 million Syrian pounds was burnt down and the amount of capital loss was estimated to be more than one billion Syrian pounds.³³⁴ This incident kept other Syrian businessmen in Syria in a state of fear. Moreover, the business community remained uncertain about who had orchestrated the attack against the factory. The Aleppan shoes industrialist no18 claimed that his factory in Syria used to be located next to al-Olabi's factory, and he stated that it was the vicious and greedy workers in al-Olabi's factory who were the masterminds.³³⁵ However, most Aleppan businessmen interviewed believed it was because al-'Ulabī refused to pay bribes to the *shabiha*, which angered them such that they burnt down the factory in retaliation.³³⁶

The expansion of violence in Syria following the exacerbation of conflict in the summer of 2012 increased the incidents of kidnappings and lootings, especially in Aleppo.³³⁷ An Aleppan wood industrialist no25 claimed that he used to have a good relationship with government staffs, stated that,

[%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%AE%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF-%D8%B9%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%8A-%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AA%D8%A8-%D9%83%D9%84-%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%A8-%D9%85%D9%86/](#).

³³⁴ “qatalū al-ṣinā’iyan Muḥammad al-Ways wa-ḥaraqū ma’āmil Khālīd al-‘Ulabī,” [They killed industrialist Muḥammad al-Ways and burned off Khālīd al-‘Ulabī’s factories] *Syriasteps*, December 14, 2012, accessed March 15, 2017, <http://syriasteps.com/index.php?d=137&id=79621>; “Ḥarīqa kabīra fī ma’mal “‘Ulabi taks”,” [A big fire in factory “‘Ulabi taks”] *Aksalser*, December 7, 2011, accessed March 15, 2017, http://www.aksalser.com/?page=view_articles&id=5d32a37c26441c1c7986d8c52c965e79&ar=356791739.

³³⁵ Aleppan shoes industrialist no18, personal interview, Gaziantep. February 22, 2015.

³³⁶ Interviews, Gaziantep, 2015; see also “ṣinā’at al-nasīj fī Ḥalab: qawāfil muḥājira ilā arḍ al-nīl,” [The textile industry in Aleppo: convoys immigrant to the land of Nile] *Orient-news*, November 1, 2012, accessed March 15, 2017, http://www.orient-news.net/ar/news_show/330.

³³⁷ Jihad Yazigi, Syria’s War Economy, Policy Brief, *European Council on Foreign Relations* (April 7, 2014) 2.

One day, I received a phone call. On the other side, I heard my son crying. They asked me to pay a ransom for my son and for my neighbour's son [\$100,000]. Then I went to the head of the intelligence service [who used to be a good friend of mine]. After I entered the office, the kidnapper called me and said, 'You want to seek help from the intelligence service?' Then the officer suggested that I pay the kidnapper the ransom. Afterward, I realised that this was a self-directed kidnap performed by the intelligence service. How could the kidnapper know that I was in the office of the head of intelligence? It was them who hired the kidnapper'.³³⁸

The kidnapping was a threat to all businessmen, indiscriminately, no matter what political ideology they had or what they had done in the past or during the revolution. The violence against the Syrian businessmen seemed to become politically motivated inside the country, but it was not only anti-regime businessmen who received threats, but so did the pro-regime businessmen from rebel groups.³³⁹ The lives of pro-regime businessmen within free areas in Syria were at risk. "After the incident in Syria, I bought a gun and put it in my car because once I'm outside of my house, I might bump into armed groups who may want to kidnap me because they know that I'm with the regime," stated an Aleppan textile industrialist no22 who is from the top 100 prominent businessmen list in 2009.³⁴⁰ Fāris al-Shihābi, the president of the Aleppan Chamber of Industry who was a loyalist to the Bashar regime, also claimed that he was targeted by the rebels many times.³⁴¹ The lack of security for the businessmen and their family members and the possibility of losing their property put extreme pressure on them.

³³⁸ Aleppan wood industrialist no25, personal interview, Gaziantep, January 30, 2015.

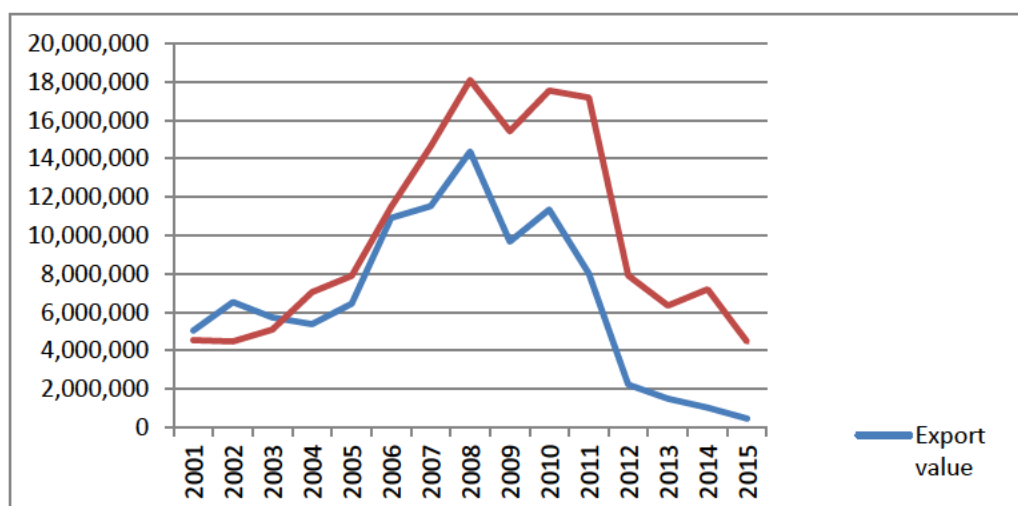
³³⁹ Suleiman Al-Khalidi, Mideast money - Aleppo business leaders targeted in Syria violence, *Reuters*, October 24, 2012, accessed March 15, 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/syria-aleppo-industry-idUSL5E8LG31V20121024>.

³⁴⁰ Aleppan textile industrialist no22, personal interview, Cairo, November 17, 2015.

³⁴¹ Ibid.

In addition to the security factor, the worsening of the Syrian economy also drove businessmen to leave Syria since they could not continue their work or make profit inside the country. Graph 3.1 demonstrates that the Syrian trade value steadily decreased between 2010 and 2013. Prior to the eruption of 2011 revolution, the export value and import value had already dropped 20% and 2% respectively between 2010 and 2011, and they slumped 71% and 53% respectively between 2011 and 2012. This suggests that the Syrian market had started to deteriorate at the beginning of the revolution, or even few months before with the Daraa protest in March 2011. Yazigi showed that the Syrian economy declined immediately after the eruption of the Daraa protest in March,

which led to an immediate fall in both consumption and investment. In May, only two months after the first protests, the country's nationwide average hotel occupancy rate fell and the number of investments licensed by the Syrian Investment Agency in the first half of 2011 dropped 43 per cent compared to the same period in 2010.³⁴²



³⁴² Yazigi, Syria's War Economy, 2.

Graph 3.1: Syrian trade value between 2001 and 2015, Unit: US Dollar thousand³⁴³

Year	Export value	Import value	Year	Export value	Import value
2001	5,047,967	4,553,496	2009	9,693,797	15,442,770
2002	6,536,363	4,487,753	2010	11,352,924	17,561,576
2003	5,730,663	5,110,634	2011	8,014,012	17,194,150
2004	5,382,567	7,048,837	2012	2,238,512	7,928,452
2005	6,449,882	7,897,930	2013	1,495,454	6,357,829
2006	10,919,371	11,488,279	2014	1,032,586	7,210,285
2007	11,545,710	14,655,130	2015	466,595	4,469,615
2008	14,380,038	18,104,749			

Table 3.2: Syrian trade value between 2001 and 2015, Unit: US Dollar thousand³⁴⁴

Since April 2011, different international sanctions have been imposed on Syria by the United States, the European Union, and the Arab League, including various bans and freezing assets, travel, and trading. By issuing economic sanctions, these countries and organisations expected to persuade the Bashar regime to stop the brutality in dealing with dissidents.³⁴⁵ The international sanctions further damaged the already fragile Syrian economy, where “28.3% (about \$6.8 billion) of the total GDP loss in 2011 and 2012 was due to the impact of the sanctions.”³⁴⁶

³⁴³ The graph is made by the researcher from the data of *International Trade Centre*, accessed March 15, 2017, http://www.trademap.org/tradestat/Product_SelCountry_TS.aspx.

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

³⁴⁵ Rabie Nasser, Zaki Mehchy, and Khalid Abu Ismail, *Socioeconomic Roots and Impact of the Syrian Crisis*, *Syrian Center for Policy Research* (2013) 61-3.

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

Under the international sanctions, the Bashar regime has taken different measures in attempts to alleviate the economic difficulties caused by those sanctions. For instance, on 24 September 2011, “the government announced a ban on imports of all goods carrying a tariff over 5 per cent.”³⁴⁷ According to residences of Damascus, the result of this ban was that the “average prices rose by 30 per cent on nearly all imported consumer goods.”³⁴⁸ The sanctions and imports made many of the businessmen’s businesses face significant supply issues, and basic products rapidly increased in price.³⁴⁹ This investment environment, along with multiple international sanctions, frustrated the Syrian business community. Bāsil al-Kuwayfi – the former head of the Chamber of Commerce in Damascus and a member of the Syrian Transitional Council who was an aluminium investor based in Egypt – stated that investors could not make profits due to the discontinuation of internal trade in Syria.³⁵⁰ Furthermore, the aggravation of the conflict inside the country heavily devastated the consuming ability of Syrian customers, and inflation within the country also became a nightmare to not only normal Syrians but also to the business community.

Furthermore, the intensification of conflict in Syria complicated the work of the businessmen. Syria became divided into different areas which were ruled by different authorities. Generally, there was the Syrian regime controlled areas, the free areas (which were dominated by the rebels), and the ISIS occupied areas. Transporting goods became much harder, as an Aleppan plastic industrialist stated no26,

³⁴⁷ Macleod, Syria: The sanctions effect.

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

³⁴⁹ Samer Abboud, The Syrian Economy: Hanging by a Thread, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, June 20, 2012, accessed March 15, 2017, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2012/06/20/syrian-economy-hanging-by-thread-pub-48598>.

³⁵⁰ Syrian Businessmen Flee with Their Money to Egypt, Gulf, *Al-Arabiya News*, October 9, 2012, accessed March 15, 2017, <https://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/10/09/242731.html>.

When your goods are crossing the borders between different areas, if you are lucky enough, you just pay a bribe. But if the people at the border are greedy, they may confiscate your goods. We cannot make any profit like this. Sometimes we need to pay more than the cost of the products.³⁵¹

Finally, the political suppression caused by the businessmen's political leanings was another factor that drove them to leave the country. As previously mentioned, the Syrian regime proactively made sure the business community would stay on the same side as the regime. Businessmen who did not act according to the regime's will would immediately receive a verbal warning or political punishment, such as, being prohibited from travelling, imprisoned, detained, or had their property or money confiscated. Detention or imprisonment was common after the eruption of 2011 revolution – 19 out of the 191 interviewees were arrested on account of their participation in the revolution, remaining in prison for between a few days and up to two years. Another dozen interviewees also claimed that their relatives or friends had been imprisoned or had disappeared during the revolution. Any businessmen whose family histories were against the regime or were related to the revolution received threats or warnings from the *mukhabarat*. “The al-Assad regime has punished those suspicious opposition supporters, confiscating their properties or bringing spurious legal charges in newly-established ‘counter-terrorism’ courts.”³⁵² For example, Ghassan Aboud was a businessman from Idlib and based in Dubai who was the founding member of Orient-NEWS, the owner of an olive-crushing factory in Idlib, and car dealerships in Damascus and possessed a clear anti-regime political position

³⁵¹ Aleppan plastic industrialist no26, personal interview, Amman, August 30, 2015.

³⁵² Rashad Kattan, Syria's Business Community Decides, *Riskadvisory*, March 12, 2014, accessed March 15, 2017, <https://news.riskadvisory.net/2014/12/syrias-business-community-decides/>.

since the beginning of the uprising. He recalled that the “Security forces burned my house, my land, and my family’s houses.....And they turned my olive oil factory into a regime military base.”³⁵³

3.3 Conclusion

Although the Syrian business community was considered less political and the ties of the economic elites with the regime were symbiotic prior to 2011, due to long-term resentment and personal experiences of suppressions from the regime, less dependency of their fortunes on the Syrian regime, habits of philanthropic help to needy people, witnessing how the Bashar regime brutally suppressed its own people, and the political calculations of the end of the Bashar regime, there was partial but meaningful participation of Syrian businessmen in the revolution against the Bashar regime. The businessmen who devoted themselves to the revolution supported the uprising mainly in terms of financial and humanitarian aids. Nevertheless, the lack of security, the deterioration of economic conditions, and political suppressions from the regime, forced them to flee the country. The timing of their emigration could be chronicled into three main periods according to the degree of conflicts and their later host country’s environment, being the beginning of 2011, mid-2012 to mid-2013, and 30 June 2013.

The massive emigration of Syrian businessmen and the partial but meaningful participation in the revolution indicate a wavering of the long-term mutual ties

³⁵³ Jacey Fortin, Syria’s Exile Economy: Entrepreneurs Flee, *International Business Times*, June 14, 2013, accessed March 15, 2017, <http://www.ibtimes.com/syrias-exile-economy-entrepreneurs-flee-war-zone-aspiring-return-rebuild-1306717>.

between the Syrian regime and the business community, since the Syrian businessmen no longer remained silent about the Assad regime's ruling and they later experienced massive emigration. Although numbers of actual participation of Syrian businessmen in the revolution could not be presented in a quantitative way, the fact that there was a certain amount of political participation on the part of the businessmen is meaningful, especially for a business community which was living under an authoritative regime for more than four decades and possessing symbiotic ties with the Assad regime.

Even though the majority of the Syrian businessmen have left Syria, their activities have continuously affected the domestic and expatriate life of Syrians. It is therefore important to first examine the decision making process of the Syrian businessmen regarding where to relocate to, and how they sorted out their new lives in the host countries and managed with the challenges during their settlement process. Chapter 5 and 6 will demonstrate that the specific background of conflict-driven businessmen emigration not only made the economic condition of the expatriate Syrian businessmen weaker than other interest-driven business diaspora, but also that the on-going conflict in their home country affected their later activities in the host countries.

Chapter 4 Relocation and Settlement: Decision-Making, Challenges, and Expectations

We Syrians [businessmen] are smart and hardworking, and we never give up in any situation. Even if we lost a great amount of our money during the war, but we still have our skills and networks. Even if you throw us into a desert, we can build up a castle successfully and quickly.

- An Aleppan textiles industrialist no27³⁵⁴

To a certain extent, after the breakout of the 2011 revolution, some Syrian businessmen actively engaged in the revolution, although the majority stayed silent as usual, and the former symbiotic ties between the Syrian regime and its business community deteriorated. Nevertheless, due to the conditions inside war-torn Syria, most Syrian businessmen had no choice but to leave the country. Following the analysis of the expatriate context of Syrian businessmen, this chapter will examine the decision-making process of whether to relocate to Turkey, Egypt, or Jordan, the challenges the businessmen encountered in these three host countries, and the changes in expectation of returning to Syria that they had. These three governments and societies demonstrated different attitudes regarding the ways in which they reacted to Syrian emigrants. In general, Turkey applied a more friendly policy towards the Syrians, the situation in Egypt became difficult for the Syrians after the coup in mid-2013, and the Jordanian government had unclear policies regarding the Syrian conflict.

³⁵⁴ Aleppan textiles industrialist no27, personal interview, Gaziantep, January 24, 2015.

First, the Syrian businessmen's decision-making process in choosing the relocation countries and their routes of migration will be investigated by showing how political relations between the host and home governments had an effect, in addition to other considerations such as distance, the economic structure of host countries, and personal networks. Previous studies have shown how the relationships between the home/ host countries and the migrants/ diasporans play an important role in the settlement process of the migrants/ diasporans; nevertheless, how the relationships between the home and host governments affect the settlement of migrants/ diasporan have been understudied.³⁵⁵ The rules, regulations, and practices towards the migrants in the host countries have been argued to bring a direct impact on the ways in which migrants settle in and develop their livelihoods in host countries.³⁵⁶ As such, the chapter will first examine the impediments that Syrian businessmen encountered during their settlement process in the host countries, namely, the legal, political, and social dimensions.

Also, previous studies on migration widely recognise that social networks such as kinships and friendships facilitate the further emigration of people to host countries.³⁵⁷ Nevertheless, the case of Syrian businessmen relocations suggests that the main consideration regarding choice of relocation was not pre-existing ties in the host countries, but rather, the economic consideration for possible future economic

³⁵⁵ Brubaker, "The 'Diaspora' Diaspora," 5-7; Cindy Horst, "Refugee Livelihoods: Continuity and Transformations," *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 25, no. 2 (2006): 10; Gorman and Kasbarian, "Introduction: Diasporas of the Modern Middle East," 9; Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1998) 22.

³⁵⁶ Castles and Miller, *The Age of Migration*; Horst, "Refugee Livelihoods."

³⁵⁷ Boyd, "Family and Personal Networks in International Migration," 645; Smith, Tarallo, and Kagiwada, "Colouring California," 254; Shah and Menon, "Chain Migration Through the Social Network," 370; Arango, "Explaining Migration," 291; Ghosh, "Transnational Ties and Intra-immigrant Group Settlement Experiences," 225.

investment. In other words, possible future investment was more significant than pre-existing ties. Finally, as Harpviken argues, as war-induced migration starts, the migrants' expectations of the duration of their exile is of a short-term stay, and this significantly affects the later decisions of the migrants' activities in the host countries.³⁵⁸ As such, the expectations of the duration of exile and their impact on Syrian businessmen's activities will be examined, in addition to how their expectations transformed with the extension of conflict in their home country.

This chapter will argue that in addition to economic considerations, the relocation and settlement process of Syrian businessmen was strongly affected by the conditions in the host countries, whether economic, social, or political. Different from other migrants or diasporans whose personal networks were important factors in deciding their relocation, the case of expatriate Syrian businessmen demonstrates that relocations were affected more by economic considerations. Moreover, although political attitudes were similar towards the Syrian conflict between the host and home governments, host governments may be less willing to accept emigrants from Syria, and vice versa. More importantly, how the lack of understanding of how political relations between the home/ host government plays an important role in the relocation process regarding the migrants/ diasporans will be demonstrated. Finally, even though Syrian businessmen did not expect to stay in the host countries for long at the beginning of their settlement, similar to Harpviken's argument, the prolongation of conflict and the damage to economic property in Syria changed their expectations.³⁵⁹ This change influenced expatriate Syrian businessmen in the host countries to work

³⁵⁸ Harpviken, *Social Networks and Migration in Wartime Afghanistan*, 76.

³⁵⁹ Ibid.

seriously on different economic investments and political activities related to the uprising.

4.1 Choice of relocation

It is easy for people from Aleppo to travel to Turkey since the border is controlled by the rebels, and it's less than 100 km between Aleppo and Gaziantep. But as Damascenes, we can only travel by plane through Beirut to Istanbul since there is no flight from Damascus to Turkey, and travelling from Damascus to Aleppo is too dangerous.

- A Damascene clothes industrialist no21³⁶⁰

After Syrian businessmen decided to flee Syria to other countries, they chose different countries and routes for their journeys. There are four main reasons why Syrian businessmen would choose a specific place of relocation: the distance between Syria and the settling countries, and the regulations for entering the host countries; the economic structure in the host countries; the political relations between the host and home governments; and personal experience and pre-existing networks of businessmen.

Distance between Syria and the host countries and the entrance regulations

Syrian businessmen followed two main migratory routes, the choice of which depended on the location of their home cities in Syria: those from the north (Aleppo,

³⁶⁰ Damascene clothes industrialist no21, personal interview, Istanbul, March 13, 2015.

Raqqa) took routes to Turkey, and those from the south (Damascus, Der'a), the centre (Homs, Hama) and the coast (Lattakia, Tartus) took routes to Jordan and Lebanon. The groups are separate because the conflict in Syria made travelling between the northern and southern parts of the country nearly impossible and unsafe. The reason most businessmen in, for example, the centre of Syria and on the coast from Homs, Hama, Lattakia, and Tartus did not head for Turkey was due to lack of safe travel caused by the conflict. It essentially prevented them from travelling from their home cities to northern Syria where they could enter Turkey. As a consequence, businessmen from the south, centre and coast ended up taking the same routes to travel to host countries, and businessmen from the north took different routes, but the two groups rarely crossed over.

On the one hand, northern groups of Syrian businessmen could reach Turkey by crossing the border between Syria and Turkey in their own vehicles. For this group to travel to geographically non-connected countries, Turkey has been considered the most important 'transfer' country to reach Egypt and Jordan. On the other hand, southern, central, and the coastal groups of Syrian businessmen could reach Jordan by crossing the Syrian-Jordanian border in their own vehicles. For this group, since Syrian businessmen could no longer fly from Syria to Turkey and Egypt, Lebanon and Jordan were the two most important 'transfer' countries.

The close distance between Syria and certain host countries encouraged the Syrian businessmen. For example, Syrians in the south-central cities of Turkey are predominantly from Aleppo. Since many of their relatives and property were still in Aleppo, it would only take a few hours to travel between the two countries in their

own vehicles. During field research in Gaziantep, nearly all interviewees and Syrians on the street were from Aleppo.³⁶¹ Moreover, there were at least three restaurants with names indicating that the owners were from Aleppo, such as, Original Halabi Restaurant which opened in Gaziantep after the 2011 revolution. For the same reason, Jordan mainly attracted Syrian businessmen from the southern part of Syria.³⁶²

However, distance alone is not sufficient to explain why Syrian businessmen would choose a specific place over another. Regulations for entering the host countries and their impact also need to be taken into consideration. The host countries' regulations affected migrants' decisions about whether or not to settle in that country, especially regulations regarding Syrians. For instance, many countries in the Middle East, particularly Gulf countries, have put in place prohibitions or restrictions to prevent Syrians from entering their countries as a consequence of the conflict, even though these countries did not change their regulations regarding the entrance of Syrians into their lands.³⁶³

The Jordanian government temporarily closed its borders with Syria more than one time between the beginning of the conflict in 2011 and March 2013.³⁶⁴ In June 2013, on 8 October 2014, 19 November 2014, and 1 April 2015, the Jordanian government

³⁶¹ Observations.

³⁶² "Syrian Businesspeople Map."

³⁶³ "duwal al-khaliy li-mādhā lā tastaqbil al-lājiyīn am li-mādhā lā yulajj'ūn 'ilayha," [Why do not the Gulf countries receive refugees or why do not they turn to them?] *Euronews*, September 30, 2015, accessed March 17, 2017, <http://arabic.euronews.com/2015/09/30/why-aren-t-rich-gulf-states-welcoming-syrian-refugeesor-are-they>.

³⁶⁴ "ma'ārik Sūriyā tughliq ma'bar Jābir ma' al-'Urdunn," [Syria's battles close Jābir passage with Jordan] *Aljazeera*, April 1, 2015, accessed April 23, 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.net/news/reportsandinterviews/2015/4/1/%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%83-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D8%AA%D8%BA%D9%84%D9%82-%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%B1-%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%86>.

had either unofficially closed its borders with Syria or officially closed the borders due to the conflict between the Syrian rebels and regime forces.³⁶⁵ On 21 June 2016, the Jordanian government officially announced the closure of their borders with Syria for security reasons, whereby no Syrians could enter the country except those who already had Jordanian residential permits.³⁶⁶ This also happened in Egypt after the political coup on 30 June 2013. However, a few Syrian businessmen were still able to enter Egypt by paying bribes of \$3000 to officials in the migration office.³⁶⁷ The considerations of security for the Jordanian government and the political change in Egypt have made it more difficult or impossible for Syrian businessmen to move to these two countries.

As such, entrance regulations influenced whether or not Syrian businessmen could enter host countries, and how easy it was to cross the border crossing normally increase the attractions of a host country, in addition to the distance between home city and host country.

Economic Structure

³⁶⁵ Tamer al-Samadi, Jordan Shuts Down Border Crossings From Syria, *Al-Monitor*, June 13, 2013, accessed April 23, 2017, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/security/2013/06/jordan-closes-border-crossings-syria.html>; A Timeline of Syria's Closing Borders, *IRIN*, January 8, 2015, accessed April 23, 2017, <http://newirin.irinnews.org/syrian-refugees-restrictions-timeline/>; Rana F. Sweis, No Syrians Are Allowed Into Jordan, Agencies Say, *The New York Times*, October 8, 2014, accessed April 23, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/09/world/middleeast/syrian-refugees-jordan-border-united-nations.html>; Suleiman Al-Khalidi, Jordan Shuts Border Crossing with Syria after Fighting, *Reuters*, April 1, 2015, accessed April 23, 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-jordan-idUSKBN0MS47F20150401>.

³⁶⁶ “al-Urdunn yu‘lin rasmiyya ghalq hudūdah wa waqf istiqbāl al-lājiyīn al-Sūrīyīn,” [Jordan officially closes its borders and stops receiving Syrian refugees], *Ammon News*, June 21, 2016, accessed April 23, 2017, <http://www.ammonnews.net/article/272890>.

³⁶⁷ Aleppan clothes industrialist no28, personal interview, Cairo, October 2, 2015.

The economic structure of the host countries also affected Syrian businessmen's choice of where to resettle. The meaning of economic structure here includes the cost of labour, local investment laws, and the markets. The cost of labour in the host countries was important to consider if businessmen were deciding to open a business after resettling, be it commercial or industrial. This was especially true for industrialists. Calculations of the local economic structure further influenced what type of businessmen was going to settle in which country, industrial or commercial. The minimum wages per month in Egypt, Jordan, Turkey, and Lebanon in 2012 were \$115, \$226, \$443, and \$450 respectively.³⁶⁸ Low minimum wage indicates that Egypt provided cheaper labour forces compared to Jordan and Turkey. As a result, most Syrian industrialists working in textiles would choose to settle in Egypt since the textile industry requires a high number of labours, and the low cost of labours there attracted Syrian textiles industrialists to invest, and 90% of the industrialists who left Syria chose Egypt.³⁶⁹

In addition, how difficult it would be to do business would affect a businessman's choice of place of relocation. On the World Bank Group website, Turkey was ranked 55th in the world for ease of doing business, followed by Jordan 113th, Lebanon 123th,

³⁶⁸ Egypt Minimum Monthly Wages, *Trading Economics*, accessed March 14, 2017, <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/egypt/minimum-wages>; Jordan, *Social Security: Office of Retirement and Disability*, accessed March 14, 2017, <https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/progdesc/ssptw/2012-2013/asia/jordan.html>; Turkey Gross Minimum Monthly Wage, *Trading Economics*, accessed March 14, 2017, <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/turkey/minimum-wages>; for Lebanon, see Lebanon Minimum Wage Rate 2017, *Minimum-wage.org*, accessed March 16, 2017, <https://www.minimum-wage.org/international/lebanon>.

³⁶⁹ "The textile industry used to be the most important industrial sector in the Syrian industry," "šinaā' al-nasiyǧ fi ḥalab;" "75% mašāni' Ḥalab mughlaqa," [75% of Aleppo factories closed] *Al-Jazeera*, August 30, 2012, accessed March 16, 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.net/news/ebusiness/2012/8/30/75-%D9%85%D9%86-%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B9-%D8%AD%D9%84%D8%A8-%D9%85%D8%BA%D9%84%D9%82%D8%A9>.

and Egypt 131th.³⁷⁰ Although the United Arab Emirates ranked 31st on the list, the high living cost in the UAE was not affordable for most Syrian businessmen.³⁷¹ The world ranking for cost of living in the UAE, Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, and Egypt are 36th, 106th, 131st, 163rd, and 230th respectively.³⁷² As such, Turkey was considered the easiest country to establish investments in for Syrian businessmen because of its relatively open and transparent business environment, and cost of living in the host countries.

Finally, another economic consideration was the markets that Syrian businessmen could access, especially for those who attempted to maintain former foreign customers after resettlement. Before the conflict, Syrian businessmen had customers in various countries, in addition to these three main host countries, such as in Iraq and Saudi Arabia. Iraq and Saudi Arabia were two out of the top five export partners of Syria between 2006 and 2010. Iraq was ranked 4th in 2006 and 2007, and 1st from 2008 to 2010. Saudi Arabia was ranked 3rd in 2006 and 2007 and 5th from 2008 to 2010. Most trading between these two countries was in the field of consumer goods, raw materials, and textiles and clothing.³⁷³ Nevertheless, due to the difficulties that Syrian businessmen encountered in moving to these countries as mentioned above, they would choose other host countries from where they could continue transporting their goods. For instance, an Aleppan plastic industrialist no29 who relocated to Istanbul and Gaziantep after the conflict used to export his products from Syria to Iraq

³⁷⁰ Economy Rankings, *The World Bank*, accessed March 16, 2017, <http://www.doingbusiness.org/rankings>.

³⁷¹ Ibid.

³⁷² Expatistan's Cost of Living World Map, *Expatistan*, accessed March 16, 2017, <https://www.expatisitan.com/cost-of-living/index>.

³⁷³ World Integrated Trade Solution, *World Bank*, accessed April 25, 2017, <http://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/SYR/Year/LTST/TradeFlow/Export/Partner/all/>.

and now continues selling his products from Turkey to Iraq. “For us as industrialists, if you do not maintain your customers, they might find new providers.”³⁷⁴ Those businessmen who used to have customers in Gulf countries might prefer to move to Jordan or Egypt to maintain the routes of product transportation.³⁷⁵ Thus, evaluating the economic structure of host countries was another factor when choosing a relocation place.

Studies suggest that personal networks of potential migrants in host countries prior to emigration can enhance the possibilities of attracting them to relocate into the specific countries where they already have acquaintances.³⁷⁶ Nevertheless, economic consideration was a more significant factor than familial ties regarding the motives for emigration of Syrian businessmen. This was due to the nature and professions of the business migrants, whose economic calculation usually decided how they were going to move. Even within a business family, brothers might not flee to the same destination unless they were working in the same business field. Rather, businessmen who were working in the same field had a higher chance of fleeing to the same destination if they had been able to trust each other enough or if they had had stable business with each other in the pre-revolution period. For example, the former vice president of the Aleppan Chamber of Industry decided to move to Ghana with one of his brothers (as opposed to the other three) since they were working in the same field

³⁷⁴ Aleppan plastic industrialist no29, personal interview, Istanbul, May 12, 2014.

³⁷⁵ Damascene detergent and chemical industrialist no2, personal interview, Amman, June 19, 2015; Aleppan plastic industrialist no9, personal interview, 6th of October, October 13, 2015.

³⁷⁶ Boyd, “Family and Personal Networks in International Migration,” 645; Smith, Tarallo, and Kagiwada, “Colouring California,” 254; Shah and Menon, “Chain Migration Through the Social Network,” 370; Arango, “Explaining Migration,” 291; Ghosh, “Transnational Ties and Intra-immigrant Group Settlement Experiences,” 225.

of investment. Out of the other three brothers, two went to the U.S. and the other went to Turkey.³⁷⁷

Political relation between the host and home governments

After the eruption of the 2011 revolution, the Turkish, Egyptian, and Jordanian governments held different political views towards the Assad regime. Although it has been demonstrated that the relationships between the host/ home countries and migrants/ diasporans influence relocation of migrants and diasporans, the analysis in this section will fill the gaps of how relations between the host and home governments crucially affect the relocation process of the migrants.³⁷⁸

Political relations between the home and host governments were a double-edged sword in influencing the decision-making process of Syrian businessmen. On the one hand, the trend of emigration of Syrian businessmen suggests that when the political orientation of the host government was contrary to that of the home government, the motivations for the businessmen to immigrate would be higher. On the other hand, Syrian businessmen would choose to move to a host country whose government's political ideology was closer to their own political leanings. The most obvious cases for supporting this argument were Turkey and Egypt. The Turkish government's political attitudes towards the Syrian regime were consistently anti-Assad. The Turkish government applied a more welcoming stance towards the arrivals of Syrians into its country and received high numbers of Syrian businessmen. In Egypt, between

³⁷⁷ Aleppo food industrialist no2, personal interview, Gaziantep, June 1, 2014.

³⁷⁸ Brubaker, "The 'Diaspora' Diaspora," 5-7; Cindy Horst, "Refugee Livelihoods," 10; Gorman and Kasbarian, "Introduction: Diasporas of the Modern Middle East," 9; Castles and Miller, *The Age of Migration* 22.

mid-2012 and mid-2013, Muhammad Morsi's government publicly condemned the Bashar regime in Syria, maintaining an outspoken and strong anti-Assad regime position, and policies regarding the entrance of Syrians the country were not difficult to comply with. Nevertheless, after Sisi came into power in mid-2013, the Egyptian policies towards the entrance of Syrians became stricter and many Egypt-based Syrian businessmen fled to Turkey.³⁷⁹

First, Turkey and Egypt used to be the main destinations for Syrian businessmen to relocate after the 2011 revolution, and many Syrian businessmen, accompanied by their capital, left for Syria to these two countries as previously demonstrated. During the Morsi period in Egypt, Egypt witnessed a high number of Syrian businessmen moving into the country. However, after the coup on 30 June 2013, the new government switched its political standpoint from supporting the revolution to supporting the Bashar regime, which led to an outflow of the Egypt-based Syrian businessmen to Turkey. As confirmed by the president of the Syrian Businessmen Assembly in Egypt, Khaldūn al-Muwaqq', the numbers of the Syrian businessmen in Egypt experienced a continuing loss after mid-2013.³⁸⁰ This was mainly due to the change of welcoming Syrians during the rule of Morsi to the unfriendly stance of the Sisi government against the Syrians and the unstable situation inside Egypt after the coup. As such, this demonstrates that an opposing political attitude between the host government and Syria would attract more businessmen to the host country.

³⁷⁹ Profile: Mohamed Morsi, *Aljazeera*, July 21, 2013, accessed April 20, 2017, www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/07/20137314127329966.html.

³⁸⁰ "Turkiyā "jannat" al-Sūrīyīn."

Second, the Turkey-based Syrian businessmen were mostly anti-regime, which meant that their political ideas were similar to the Turkish government's, which was also strongly anti-Assad, there were at least two formal anti-Assad regime's business organisations – the Syrian Business Forum and the Syrian Economic Forum – established by expatriate Syrian businessmen active in Turkey.³⁸¹ In the city of Gaziantep, the Syrian Interim Government, the Syrian National Coalition, and the Al-Waad Party – which is a Muslim Brotherhood political party – also had businessmen participating in anti-regime activities.³⁸² I will discuss these business organisations and political coalitions and political parties in chapter 6. In Egypt, once the pro-Bashar's Sisi regime came into power in mid-2013, most Egypt-based Syrian businessmen who did not flee the country either had closer political orientations to the Syrian regime, or were self-declared as politically neutral.³⁸³ For example, the president of the Syrian Businessmen Assembly in Egypt, Khaldūn al-Muwaqq', took on an official business delegation for visiting the Minister of Internal Trade and Consumer Protection, Samīr Qāḍī Amīn. During the meeting, al-Muwaqq' stated that the Syrian Businessmen Assembly was “the economic partner of the country (Syria), and all the (Syrian) businessmen are happy to return back to the country for work.”³⁸⁴ This kind of visit from the Egypt-based Syrian businessmen to the Bashar regime was never reported under the reign of Morsi. Thus, not only did the political atmosphere inside the host countries affect the numbers of Syrian businessmen moving in, but so

³⁸¹ Syrian Business Forum, accessed March 16, 2017, www.syrianbf.org/en; Syrian Economic Forum, accessed March 16, 2017, <http://www.syrianef.org/En/>.

³⁸² *Waad Party*, accessed January 29, 2017, <http://waedparty.com/all.php?id=36>.

³⁸³ Interviews.

³⁸⁴ “wazīr al-tijāra yaltaqī wafd tajammu' rijāl al-a' māl al-Sūrī bi-Miṣr,” [Commerce Minister meets Syrian Business group in Egypt's delegation] *Aliqtisadi*, February 10, 2014, accessed March 16, 2017, <https://sy.aliqtisadi.com/268694-%D8%A5%D8%AC%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B9-%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%AB%D9%85%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A8%D9%88%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A/>.

did their different political orientations. It is hard to find public sources to show the Egypt-based Syrian businessmen who self-identify as politically neutral, however, most Syrian businessmen interviewed during the fieldwork stated that they were neutral. Nevertheless, this did not mean that those Syrian businessmen actually held self-proclaimed neutral views on the Syrian conflict, rather, their political neutrality may be attributed to the political atmosphere in Egypt, which had switched from a Syrian-friendly and anti-Assad stance to an anti-Syrian and pro-Assad position after Sisi came into power in mid-2013. This shows that positive relations between the Syrian regime and host governments could limit the appeal of a host country, and at the same time, could attract businessmen whose political ideas were similar to the host government's.

Pre-existing Networks and Personal Experience

Pre-existing networks in host countries would increase the motivations for other potential migrants to move. This was true, to a certain extent, for Syrian businessmen, who might decide to move to another host country where they had friends, relatives, or acquaintances while choosing a place of relocation. Nevertheless, entry regulations and economic conditions exceeded social ties regarding the Syrian businessmen's emigration.

As previously mentioned in chapter 1, the Syrian business community experienced different degrees of emigration due to the government's nationalisation policy in the 1960s, and many businessmen went to Lebanon, Jordan and Saudi Arabia at that

time.³⁸⁵ And at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s the Syrian regime suppressed a domestic branch of the Muslim Brotherhood insurgency and later forced thousands of Muslim Brotherhood leaders and members to leave Syria for Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Turkey.³⁸⁶ This indicates that Syrian diasporas had begun to spread to other countries long before the 2011 revolution. Nevertheless, once the Syrian businessmen decided to leave Syria, most did not head to Jordan or Saudi Arabia where there were already a great number of Syrians prior to their departures. This was mainly due to the local authorities' regulations allowing Syrians entry and the economic conditions in these countries. Although those Syrian businessmen might have other familial or business networks in other countries, they might not move to these places due to the fact that they might not manage to enter or due to the possible economic profits they could make.

Nevertheless, pre-existing networks still, to a certain extent, affected Syrian businessmen's decision-making process. Before the revolution, Syrian businessmen had business activities, business partners, and relatives in other countries in the area. These economic and social networks were a pull factor in attracting Syrian businessmen to choose particular host countries. In terms of economics, for instance, Turkey played an important role in Syria's international trade in the pre-revolution era

³⁸⁵ Ray J. Mouawad, "Syria and Iraq - Repression: Disappearing Christians of the Middle East," *Middle East Quarterly*, 8, no. 1 (2001): 54; Elizabeth Picard, "Managing Identities among Expatriate Business Across The Syrian-Lebanese Boundary," in *State Frontiers: Borders and Boundaries in the Middle East*, edited by Inga Brandell (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006) 81; Perthes, "A Look at Syria's Upper Class," 32.

³⁸⁶ Raphaël Lefèvre, Can Syria's Muslim Brotherhood Salvage Its Relations with Riyadh? *Carnegie Middle East Center*, March 28, 2014, accessed March 16, 2017, <http://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/55052>; Raphaël Lefèvre, *Ashes of Hama : the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria* (London : Hurst & Company, 2013) 115.

Turkey was also Syria's seventh largest exporter and third largest importer in 2011.³⁸⁷

This suggests that prior to 2011, the strong bilateral trade between Syria and Turkey used to be active, and that some Syrian businessmen who used to have business in Turkey might have had Turkish business partners or Turkish business acquaintances. For example, one Damascene box industrialist no22 moved to Turkey because his family business used to have a Turkish business partner. He eventually sought help from his father's old business partner and later built up business partnerships with him.³⁸⁸

In terms of social ties, Turkey's citizenship regulations allow individuals of other nationalities who can trace roots back to the late Ottoman Empire to obtain Turkish citizenship.³⁸⁹ As such, some Syrian businessmen either held Turkish nationality or had a Turkish business partner inside Turkey before the war had started. Among the 138 Turkey-based Syrian businessmen interviewed during fieldwork, 12 already had Turkish nationality (four had been based in Turkey before the 2011 revolution), and another four were applying for nationality.³⁹⁰

Previous economic and personal ties in other countries can be considered as bridges taking Syrian businessmen out of Syria. These former social ties and economic activities explain why Syrian businessmen moved to Turkey, Egypt and Jordan.³⁹¹

³⁸⁷ "Imports and Exports by Countries 2006-2011," *Syrian Central Bureau of Statistics* (2011) accessed June 29, 2014, <http://www.cbssyr.sy/trade/Foreign-Trade/2011/Trade-State2.htm>.

³⁸⁸ Damascene box industrialist no22, personal interview, Istanbul, April 23, 2015.

³⁸⁹ "al-jinsiyya al-Turkiyya hulm mazlūm kull mazlūm," [Turkish nationality is the dream of every oppressed] *Turkpress*, December 1, 2014, accessed March 17, 2017, www.turkpress.co/node/3761.

³⁹⁰ Interviews.

³⁹¹ "Syrian Businesspeople Map."

Nevertheless, there is no account of Syrian businessmen moving to Egypt or Jordan to obtain citizenship since the local regulations did not offer foreign investors local citizenship.

Thus, the decision-making process for Syrian businessmen included the distance between the host countries and Syria as well as their entry regulations, the economic structure in the host countries and their political relations with the Syrian regime, and former social ties which the Syrian businessmen had prior to their departure. The decisions of the Syrian businessmen could not be explained simply by either one of the factors alone. Nevertheless, in choosing a place of relocation, the economic consideration was a crucial factor, even more important than familial ties.

4.2 The challenges of the Syrian businessmen during their settlement process

After the Syrian businessmen made their decision about which country they would go to, they encountered various legal, political, and social challenges from the host countries. Legally, Syrian businessmen needed to deal with local regulations issued by local authorities before and after their entry into the country. Politically, the relations between the host government and Syria, to a certain extent, determined the atmosphere in the host countries. Socially, the businessmen would need to engage in the host countries by interacting with the local communities. Since Turkey, Egypt and Jordan dealt with the businessmen differently in legal, political, and social aspects, the constraints the businessmen encountered during their settlement process will be demonstrated. Table 4.1 indicates the general context of the various degrees of difficulty that the businessmen had when settling in. The following paragraphs will

explain the different situations in these three host countries regarding the Syrian businessmen from the legal, political and social aspects.

	Turkey	Egypt	Jordan
Legal	Easy → Medium	Easy → Hard	Easy → Hard
Political	Anti-Assad	Anti-Assad>Pro-Bashar	Unclear
Social	Different	Medium	Similar

Table 4.1 Legal, Political and social environments of the host countries towards the Syrian businessmen

a. Legal perspective: entering, residence and business regulations

Saudi Arabia prohibits Syrians from travelling in and out unless you have a residence permit. Egypt is ousting our people out of their lands. Jordan [is] afraid our arrival may have an impact on their local economy. You can see how the other Arab countries hate the Syrians through this war. It is the Turks who are helping us now. Such a shame for the Arabs.

- An Aleppan food industrialist no30³⁹²

The above quote from an Aleppan industrialist who relocated to Gaziantep after the middle of 2012 reflects the general situation regarding the entry of Syrians into their neighbouring countries, indicating that it was a critical issue for resettlement. As such, in order to examine the challenges that Syrian businessmen faced from the legal perspective, the entry regulations of host countries towards Syrian businessmen will

³⁹² Aleppan food industrialist no30, personal interview, Gaziantep, May 26, 2014.

first be taken into account, and then residential permits and business laws of the host countries which Syrians had to deal with after entry will be examined. These two issues were the most pressing concerns that Syrian businessmen needed to address at the beginning of their settlement.

Entering the countries

At the beginning of the Syrian revolution in 2011, Turkey, Egypt, and Jordan all applied fairly simple regulations on the entry of Syrians into their lands. The Turkish government had applied the ‘open door’ policy regarding the entry of Syrians into the country since the beginning of 2011.³⁹³ During that period, Syrians could easily enter Turkey without any restrictions, and even without bringing any of their personal official documents if they entered through the Turkish-Syrian borders. The situation in Egypt was similar to that of Turkey at the beginning of 2011. That is, Syrians could enter Egypt easily with their Syrian passports.³⁹⁴ Egyptian policy welcomed Syrians, especially under the rule of Mohammad Morsi between mid-2012 and mid-2013. Jordan had received great praise for their open-border policy towards the Syrians at the beginning of 2011, whereby Syrians could simply enter Jordan with their passports.³⁹⁵ Nevertheless, these three countries later made changes, from minor to major, in their regulations regarding the entry of Syrians into their countries.

³⁹³ Souad Ahmadoun, Turkey’s Policy toward Syrian Refugees: Domestic Repercussions and the Need for International Support, *Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik* (2014) 1.

³⁹⁴ Hend Kortam, “New Requirements for Entry of Syrians: Entry Requirements Include Having a Prior Visa,” *Daily News Egypt*, July 10, 2013, accessed March 16, 2017, www.dailynewsegypt.com/2013/07/10/new-requirements-for-entry-of-syrians/.

³⁹⁵ Luigi Achilli, Syrian Refugees in Jordan a Reality Check, Policy brief, *Migration Policy Centre*, EUI (2015) 3.

In Turkey, regulations did not change massively until 6 January 2016 when the government issued new visa regulations on Syrians whereby Syrians who wanted to travel to Turkey were required to have a visa, except those travelling through the Turkish-Syrian borders in southern Turkey.³⁹⁶ This was in reaction to the demographic pressure on Turkish society caused by 2 million Syrians who had relocated to Turkey by the end of 2014, which led to the rise of living cost such as house rents inside Turkey and made significant wage decrease in the areas which Syrians mostly relocated in.³⁹⁷ It forced the Turkish government to adjust the former ‘open-door’ policy.

The Egyptian and Jordanian governments either tightened their border control or even closed off their borders against the Syrians after the 2011 revolution. After the coup in Egypt in mid-2013 when Mohammad Morsi was forced to step down and was replaced by the pro-Assad regime Sisi, Egyptian policy on Syrians experienced a 180-degree turn around. On 9 July 2013, the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that Syrians who attempted to enter Egypt would be required to have a visa.³⁹⁸ The Jordanian government officially announced the closing of the borders with Syria in June 2016 due to the escalation of conflict in Syria and the fear that the conflict would extend into Jordan. Since the entry requirements for the Syrian businessmen became more difficult in Egypt and Jordan as of mid-2013, some Syrian businessmen who had already relocated to Egypt and Jordan after the 2011 revolution

³⁹⁶ Turkey does a U-Turn, Imposes Entry Visas on Syrians, *The New Arab*, December 29, 2015, accessed March 16, 2017, <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2015/12/29/turkey-does-a-u-turn-imposes-entry-visas-on-syria> ns.

³⁹⁷ Effect of the Syrian Refugees on Turkey, *ORSAM (Center for Middle Eastern Strategic Studies)* (January 2015) 10-15, accessed March 12, 2017, <http://www.orsam.org.tr/files/Raporlar/rapor195/195eng.pdf>.

³⁹⁸ Kortam, “New Requirements for Entry.”

had to re-emigrate to Turkey. Regulations directly affected the possibility of Syrian businessmen entering other countries, since if the host countries did not open their borders to Syrians and had strict regulations against their entry, Syrian businessmen could not emigrate there. Thus, the regulations of the host countries towards Syrians entering were the main challenges in deciding whether or not Syrians could relocate to those countries.

Residential permits and business regulations

After entering the host countries, the next legal steps for Syrian businessmen were to solve the issue of residency. If the businessmen needed to stay in these host countries for a long period of time, they needed to have legal residency. The two main differences between Turkey, Egypt, and Jordan regarding the applications for residence of expatriate Syrian businessmen were the prices of application fees and the regulations for establishing a company.

Most Syrians after relocating to the host countries would apply for residential permits as refugees, students, or tourists. However, the businessmen did not apply for the same types of residential permits as their fellow countrymen; rather, they applied mostly for investment residential permits. This was mainly due to the fact that, if they wanted to establish companies and register those companies in the host countries, having an investment residential permit was the condition to do so. Also, the Syrian businessmen who relocated to Turkey could not purchase real estate through as Syrian citizens, but rather only through their companies that were registered in Turkey.

Turkey-based Syrian businessmen might even have the chance of gaining citizenships, which started to get discussed in the news at the end of 2014.³⁹⁹ Even during fieldwork in Turkey between mid-2014 and mid-2015, Turkey-based Syrian businessmen stated that if they had an investment residential permit and a company in Turkey, after five years they would have the chance of receiving Turkish nationality.⁴⁰⁰ In July 2016, the Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced that Syrians in Turkey might receive Turkish nationality in the future.⁴⁰¹ Since many were forced to leave Syria due to the conflict and there was no sign of the end of the conflict, and since some had participated in anti-Assad activities and were wanted by the Assad regime, the possibility of receiving Turkish nationality also encouraged them to apply for an investment residential permit.

The main differences in business regulations among the three host countries were the required amount of capital for establishing a company and regulations regarding the establishment of a commercial company. There was no minimum capital requirement in Egypt to start a limited liability company (LLC), while in Turkey it cost at least 10,000 Turkish lira (around \$3000), and in Jordan it cost 50,000 Jordanian dinars (around \$70,430).⁴⁰² This suggests that if Syrian businessmen wanted to establish new companies in one of these three countries, Egypt provided the lowest threshold

³⁹⁹ “mā hiya shurūṭ al-ḥuşūl ‘alā al-jinsiyya al-Turkiyya li-l-Sūrīyīn,” [What are the conditions for obtaining Turkish citizenship for Syrians?] *Orient Net*, October 15, 2014, accessed May 15, 2017, http://www.orient-news.net/ar/news_show/81911.

⁴⁰⁰ Interviews, Turkey, mid-2014 to mid-2015.

⁴⁰¹ Turkey’s Refugee Crisis: The Politics of Permanence, *International Crisis Group*, (30 November 2016) accessed May 15, 2017, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/western-europemediterranean/turkey/turkey-s-refugee-crisis-politics-permanence>.

⁴⁰² Guide to Doing Business: Egypt, *LexMundi* (March 2012) 5, accessed March 20, 2017, www.lexmundi.com/Document.asp?DocID=4291; How To Incorporate in Turkey, *ADMD*, accessed March 20, 2017, www.admdlaw.com/how-to-incorporate-in-turkey/#.WSzEGmiGM2w; Doing Business in Jordan, *PKF Progroup* (October 2011) 18, accessed March 20, 2017, www.pkf.com/media/608484/doing%20business%20in%20jordan.pdf.

for opening a new investment project, followed by Turkey and Jordan. Moreover, the corporate income tax for foreign companies in Jordan, Turkey, and Egypt were 10%, 20%, and 22.5% respectively in 2016.⁴⁰³ This shows that Jordan had the lowest requirements of tax payment for Syrian companies such that the tax to be paid in Jordan is only half of the tax in Turkey or Egypt.

The regulations for foreign investors to establish a commercial company in Turkey were different from those in Egypt and Jordan. The regulation in Egypt allows foreign investors to have 100% ownership of the companies; nevertheless, both the types of LLC and joint stock company (JSC) do not allow their foreign investors to conduct importation from outside of Egypt.⁴⁰⁴ For Jordan, foreign investors can hold 100% of the share of their companies, but “Foreign entities may not however have ownership in excess of 50% of construction and certain other commercial ventures” according to the Jordanian investment law.⁴⁰⁵ Only the regulations in Turkey did not have any of the above mentioned limitations for foreign investors to establish companies in its country.⁴⁰⁶ The different minimum requirement also directly affected the Syrian businessmen’s types of investment in the host countries. A Damascene real estate investor no23 explained how this difference in regulations affected the Syrian businessmen’s investment types,

⁴⁰³ Jordan, *PWC*, accessed March 20, 2017, taxsummaries.pwc.com/ID/Jordan-Corporate-Taxes-on-corporate-income; Turkey, *PWC*, accessed March 20, 2017, taxsummaries.pwc.com/ID/Turkey-Corporate-Taxes-on-corporate-income; Egypt, *PWC*, accessed March 20, 2017, taxsummaries.pwc.com/ID/Egypt-Corporate-Taxes-on-corporate-income.

⁴⁰⁴ Doing Business in Egypt: A Tax and Legal Guide, *PWC* (2016) 5, accessed March 17, 2017, <https://www.pwc.com/m1/en/tax/documents/doing-business-guides/egypt-tax-and-legal-doing-business-guide.pdf>.

⁴⁰⁵ Doing Business in Jordan, 11.

⁴⁰⁶ Establishing a Business in Turkey, *Investment Support and Promotion Agency of Turkey*, accessed March 17, 2017, www.invest.gov.tr/en-US/investmentguide/investorguide/Pages/EstablishingABusinessInTR.aspx.

I do not think many Syrian businessmen would like to open a commercial company in Jordan or Egypt, since they cannot control the whole company by themselves because of the local regulations. Unless they know somebody there, they will not open a commercial company.⁴⁰⁷

Even though having a registered company in the host country and holding an investment residential permit gave fully legal status, Syrian businessmen who had this status were not without legal or residential problems. For example, as mentioned earlier, in Turkey Syrian businessmen were not allowed to purchase real estate under their own names, but could only do so under the name of their companies. In Jordan, even though Syrian businessmen held investment residential permits, their parents or children might still have entry issues once they traveled outside of Jordan and expected to re-enter. For example, an Aleppan food industrialist no31 in Jordan stated,

One Syrian businessman's twelve-year-old daughter travelled to Europe for language school. However, on her way back, she was refused boarding on the flight, even though her father has an investment residential permit in Jordan. These kinds of travel incidents happen to our families quite frequently even though we have registered a company or factory in Jordan.⁴⁰⁸

This kind of travel issue also happened with some relatives of the Egypt-based Syrian businessmen. "I registered a company in Egypt for producing clothes, but I cannot bring my elder parents to here," stated the Aleppan clothes industrialist no28.⁴⁰⁹ It not only frustrated the Jordan and Egypt-based Syrian businessmen who had invested in

⁴⁰⁷ Damascene real estate investor no23, personal interview, Istanbul, March 5, 2015.

⁴⁰⁸ Aleppan food industrialist no31, personal interview, Amman, August 2, 2015.

⁴⁰⁹ Aleppan clothes industrialist no28, personal interview, Cairo, October 2, 2015.

and had legal residencies for these countries, but it also made these Syrian businessmen feel insecure about their legal status.

Investigating the entry regulations and residential permits and the business regulations of the three host countries demonstrates the different degrees of difficulty that Syrian businessmen had. Not only did these regulations require a certain amount of money, but in some cases, connections to solve issues. Furthermore, these regulations were not static, but rather dynamic and had been changed along with the host governments' policies and incidents in the countries. Even after Syrian businessmen entered the host countries and completed all the required documents for residence and established their companies, their lives were not fully secured.

b. Political perspective: political dynamics towards the Syrian businessmen

In Turkey, the government welcomes the arrival of Syrians, but the situation is the opposite in Egypt. The attitudes of the host governments toward the Syrians directly decide what our [the Syrian businessmen] businesses will be like.

- A Damascene household goods industrialist no24⁴¹⁰

In addition to local regulations, the political dynamics of the host countries also affected the settlement process of the Syrian businessmen in the host countries. The political dynamics regarding the settlement of the Syrian businessmen were primarily attributed to the political relations between the host governments and the Syrian regime, especially depending on how the host governments reacted towards the Syrian

⁴¹⁰ Damascene household goods industrialist no24, personal interview, Istanbul, April 7, 2015.

revolution. The political relations also influenced the atmospheres within host countries for Syrian businessmen.

Since the eruption of the revolution in Syria, the Turkish, the Egyptian, and the Jordanian governments have held different political stances on the Syrian uprising. The Turkish government did not cut off official ties with the Syrian regime at the beginning of the revolution, but rather they were attempting to be a mediator through official talks between the regime and the rebels. Nevertheless, the Turkish government changed its position and publically condemned the Bashar regime in mid-2011.⁴¹¹ This policy remains in place to the present day.

Egypt was dealing with its own political transition from the then recent ousting of Hosni Mubarak after three decades of rule. Between the beginning of 2011 and 30 June 2012, the Egyptian government was temporarily ruled by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces. During this one-year period, the Egyptian policy towards the Syrian uprising was vague due to Egypt's internal situation. When the newly elected president Muhammad Morsi came into office in mid-2012, Egyptian policy towards the Syrian regime shifted from being vague, yet still following the Arab League's position on anti-al-Assad regime. However, the support of the Syrian revolution ended after the military coup on 3 July 2013 when the General Abdel Fatah al-Sisi became the new leader of Egypt. During Sisi's reign in Egypt, the government started to treat the Egyptian-based Syrians harsher than before.⁴¹²

⁴¹¹ Christopher Phillips, Into the quagmire: Turkey's frustrated Syria policy, *Chatham House* (2012) 5; Ömer Taşpınar, "Turkey's Strategic Vision and Syria," *The Washington Quarterly*, 35, no. 3 (2012): 137.

⁴¹² Hussein Abdul-Aziz, The Egyptian Policy on the Syrian Crisis, *MEMO Middle East Monitor*, May 28, 2015, accessed March 16, 2017, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20150528-the-egyptian-policy-on-the-syrian-crisis/>.

Jordan's policy on the Syrian revolution was seen as ambiguous since they were more centred on their own internal stability at the time. The Jordanian government was mostly cautious about the Syrian event, neither supporting the Syrian regime, nor standing with the opposition.⁴¹³

The Turkish and Egyptian governments both went through different phases and had varying degrees of policy changes. The Turkish government shifted their political stance regarding the Syrian regime from being a mediator to being anti-regime. The Egyptian government's policies towards the Syrian regime changed from a vague position to an anti-regime position, then to a pro-regime position. Jordan's policy was more consistent and politically ambiguous than Turkey and Egypt. These different political relations between the host governments and the Syrian regime further delineated the general political atmosphere inside the host countries towards Syrians. It also led to different political atmospheres for Syrian businessmen regarding their settlements in these places. In Turkey, the government was widely known for its support of the Syrian opponents, and the situation in Egypt was the opposite of Turkey. These two governments both had clear political positions regarding the Syrian revolution, and stated publicly which side they were supporting. The Jordanian government maintained a much lower political profile. The political atmosphere in Turkey was clearly advantageous to the Syrian opposition, while in Egypt it was the opposite. In Jordan, the situation for the Syrian businessmen was less politicised than in Turkey or Egypt.

⁴¹³ Nerouz Satik and Khalid Walid Mahmoud, "The Syrian Crisis: An Analysis of Neighboring Countries' Stances," *Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies* (2013) 16; Marwan Muasher, Jordan's Ambiguous Syria Policy, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, June 9, 2014, accessed March 16, 2017, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2014/06/09/jordan-s-ambiguous-syria-policy-pub-55832>.

Since the local governments' attitudes towards the Syrian businessmen were not stable and could take a 180-degree change, Syrian businessmen often needed to adjust their behaviour and speech to accommodate the political correctness in the host countries. Syrian businessmen were also required to adjust their political leanings depending on any changes in the local government's political position toward the Syrian conflict. In Egypt, Syrian businessmen either had to leave the country or remain silent about their differing political views, especially after the mid-2013 coup. Furthermore, the clear political stances of the Turkish and Egyptian governments towards the Syrian conflict made it easier for Syrian businessmen with clear anti-Syrian regime politics to settle in Turkey, and made it more difficult for businessmen who were anti-regime to settle in Egypt, and vice versa for the pro-regime businessmen.

c. Social perspective: attitudes of the local communities towards the Syrian businessmen

I drive my Syrian car on the street in Gaziantep. I need to be like an angel, and sometimes I even do not look at the other drivers.

- An Aleppan interior design businessman no32⁴¹⁴

Along with the legal and the political aspects of settling in host countries, the Syrian businessmen also needed to interact with the local communities. The analysis of fieldwork data and the media press suggests that Syrian businessmen mainly needed

⁴¹⁴ Aleppan interior design businessman no32, personal interview, Gaziantep, January 05, 2015.

to deal with three major issues from the social perspective: the language barrier in Turkey, the public opinions of local communities regarding Syrian businessmen, and different business practices in the host countries.

Language barrier

Out of the three host countries, Turkey posed major difficulties to Syrian businessmen due to the language issue. This not only became a problem for the businessmen while managing their businesses, but it also made their daily life harder. Both the Syrians and the Turkish community could not communicate with each other easily. “I tried to learn Turkish and speak with the local people. Once when I was using Turkish to communicate with a Turkish guy, I mistakenly used a word which has a negative meaning, and he was furious and just left the office,” stated an Aleppo³² businessman who owned a design company.⁴¹⁵ Nevertheless, there were some businessmen who could speak intermediate to advanced Turkish because of their former business experiences in the country. For them, the language was less of an issue. The majority of Syrian businessmen, however, did not understand Turkish, but they sincerely understood the importance of having the language skills necessary for doing business with the local business people. As such, they would recruit translators. The Syrian businessmen would choose Turkmen Syrians who also left Syria for Turkey as translators, or other Syrians who could speak Turkish.⁴¹⁶

Public opinions regarding the Syrian businessmen

⁴¹⁵ Ibid.

⁴¹⁶ Interviews and observations.

As Fussell suggests, the attitudes of locals in the host countries towards the migrants is an influential factor which will affect inter-group relations; if the locals hold prejudices towards the migrants, they will probably not be very welcoming.⁴¹⁷ As such, local public opinions about the arrival of Syrians did indeed affect their settlement. However, on the one hand host governments may have their own political stances towards the Syrian revolution which affected the settlement process of Syrian businessmen; on the other hand, public opinions may or may not be in accordance with the policies of their governments. Thus, the expatriate Syrian businessmen may need to deal with contrary attitudes between the host governments and the locals in the host countries.

The public opinions of the Turkish population towards the Syrians were, in some cases, not as friendly as those of the Turkish government's. There have been many protests against having Syrians in the country.⁴¹⁸ In turn, many Syrians have been aggravated and insulted by the local Turks.⁴¹⁹ This anti-Syrian atmosphere was not restricted to Syrians from lower social strata, but rather rich Syrian businessmen who had established companies were not immune from local aggression. An Aleppan furniture industrialist no33 who opened a fast food restaurant in Gaziantep after his arrival in Turkey stated how his restaurant was destroyed by the local people,

⁴¹⁷ Elizabeth Fussell, "Warmth of the Welcome: Attitudes toward Immigrants and Immigration Policy," *Annual Review Social* (2014): 2.

⁴¹⁸ Ismā'il Jamāl, "mi'āt al-Atrāk yatazāharūn ḍidd al-Sūrīyīn wa-yaḥṭamūn mumtalakāti-him li-l-muṭālaba bi-rahīli-him," [Hundreds of Turks demonstrate against the Syrians, destroying their property to demand their deportation] *Alquds*, July 15, 2014, accessed March 17, 2017, <http://www.alquds.co.uk/?p=193025>.

⁴¹⁹ "majmū'a min al-Atrāk tuhājim maḥallāt al-Sūrīyīn fī Anqara," [A group of Turks attack Syrian shops in Ankara] *RT*, July 18, 2016, accessed March 17, 2017, <https://arabic.rt.com/news/832725-الأتراك-تهاجم-محلات-السوريين-أنقرة>.

One day, I saw a car accident outside of my restaurant. It was between a Syrian woman driver and a Turkish man. They were standing on the streets and shouting at each other. I saw the Turkish man almost hit the Syrian woman so I thought I should try to calm them down. I went to them and tried to stop them from physically fighting. Then the Turkish driver turned his anger on me – he thought that I knew the Syrian driver. Then he left. Ten minutes later he came back with around twenty other Turkish people with sticks in their hands. They just broke into my restaurant and destroyed everything they saw. The police were just standing outside the restaurant not doing anything.⁴²⁰

Many other similar incidents happened to Syrian businessmen. “You see why I would rather drive an old car than a new one? It is quite possible that our [Syrian] cars will be attacked by the locals. One time, I went back home, and the next day I could not find one of the tires of my car,” stated the Aleppan food industrialist no2.⁴²¹

Furthermore, Syrian businessmen experienced additional discrimination, complaining that the Turkish people were not willing to rent houses to Syrians, even those who had the money. “We would pay two or three times normal the rent. However, many Turkish landlords just refused to rent their houses to us once they knew that we are from Syria,” stated an Aleppan packaging industrialist no34 in Istanbul.⁴²²

During fieldwork interviews, several other Syrian businessmen who experienced similar scenarios explained that their companies or restaurants were attacked by the local people, or that the money in their offices was stolen.⁴²³ “In Turkey, it’s like half the population welcomes the Syrians, but the other half of the population does not like

⁴²⁰ Aleppan furniture industrialist no33, personal interview, Gaziantep, May 22, 2014.

⁴²¹ Aleppan food industrialist no2, personal interview, Gaziantep, December 29, 2014.

⁴²² Aleppan packaging industrialist no34, personal interview, Istanbul, April 3, 2015.

⁴²³ Interviews, Gaziantep, December 2014- February 2015.

us. The latter group of the people are supporters of the opposition parties in Turkey,” stated an Aleppan textile industrialist no35.⁴²⁴

The main opposition party in Turkey – the Republican People’s Party (CHP) – opposed to the current Turkish policy regarding the Syrians in Turkey. During one of the campaigns of the general election on 23 April 2015 in Mersin, the Chairman of the CHP, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, pledged that if they won the election, the CHP “[would] send our Syrian brothers back. We will say to them, ‘Sorry, but go back to your hometown.’”⁴²⁵ This kind of statement from the CHP reflected not only a political idea of its party, but also indicated that this policy had gained support from the CHP advocates in the country.

During the Morsi period in Egypt, Syrians enjoyed political freedoms in expressing their political identity. “You can even see some Syrian stores hanged the Syrian revolution flags outside their stores, or Syrians here walked on streets waving the [revolution] flags,” stated an Aleppan suits industrialist no36.⁴²⁶ Many Syrians would walk the streets, protesting the tyrannous regime in Syria and demand a political change.⁴²⁷ However, following the ousting of Morsi and the rise of Sisi in Egypt, the political atmosphere changed from anti-Assad to pro-Assad. Moreover, Syrians

⁴²⁴ Aleppan textile industrialist no35, personal interview, Gaziantep, December 24, 2014.

⁴²⁵ CHP’s Latest Election Promise of Sending Back Syrian Refugees in Turkey Comes under Criticism, *Daily Sabah*, April 23, 2015, accessed May 15, 2017, <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/2015/04/23/chps-latest-election-promise-of-sending-back-syrian-refugees-in-turkey-comes-under-criticism>.

⁴²⁶ Aleppan suits industrialist no36, personal interview, Al-Obour, November 1, 2015.

⁴²⁷ “al-thuwār al-Sūriyīn fi miydān al-Taḥriyr 2012-6-21 j 4,” [Syrian revolutionaries in al-Taḥriyr Square 2012-6-21, part 4] *YouTube*, July 6, 2012, accessed March 17, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nFvC00HR-HA&app=desktop>; “thawra Sūriyya fi wajdān sha‘b Miṣr,” [Syria revolution in the conscience of the people of Egypt] *Syrianchange*, April 6, 2013, accessed March 17, 2017, <https://syrianchange.wordpress.com/2013/04/06/ثورةسوريافيوجدان-شعب-مصر/>.

became considered to be supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood. Obviously, the life of the Syrians in Egypt became extremely difficult during this period. The Aleppan plastic industrialist no9 who has a factory in the city 6th of October stated,

Many of my Syrian business friends' cars were stolen after Sisi came into power, and many of them have even been robbed on streets or in shopping malls. Once, a business friend was driving in the city 6th of October. Three guys got off their tuktuk with a gun, and robbed him of all of his money and car. That was at the end of 2013.⁴²⁸

Syrian businessmen were generally considered by the local Egyptians to be 'rich people,' even though many of them were not as wealthy as the local Egyptians had believed. During fieldwork in the Gisir El-Suez area of Cairo, where many textile workshops and stores are located, I was walking on the street looking for Syrian-owned shops. I went into an Egyptian clothes shop and asked the owner where the Syrian shops were. He responded, "Why do you want to do research on the Syrians? They are wealthy. They are richer than us."⁴²⁹ This suggests that the local Egyptians might consider that the Syrians in their country are 'normal' people who are in good economic situations. Egyptians' general impressions of Syrians negatively impacted the lives of the Syrian businessmen since they could be remnants of the Muslim Brotherhood or wealthy people who came to their country to compete with the local population.

Syrian businessmen based in Jordan had less tense relationships with the local communities than those in Turkey or Egypt. Jordanians in general did not have

⁴²⁸ Aleppan plastic industrialist no9. Personal interview. 6th of October. October 13, 2015.

⁴²⁹ Egyptian clothes shop owner no1, conversation, Cairo, October 27, 2015.

prejudices or discriminate as some Turks or Egyptians did. Since some famous Syrian dessert shops' names were well known in Jordan prior to 2011, some Jordanian businessmen even used Syrian commercial brands to raise their own visibility in the market. For example, an ice cream shop and a kunafa store called 'Bakdāsh' and 'Nafīsa' respectively were located on Makka Street in Amman.⁴³⁰ The signs outside the shop were very 'Syrian,' using pictures of the al-Umawi mosque or the Aleppo castle.⁴³¹ The names of the shop and the images on the signs made customers believe that they were branches of the famous 'Bakdāsh' and 'Nafīsa' shops in Damascus, both being well known in Jordan. However, after speaking with the workers in the shops and other Syrian businessmen in the city, it turned out that these shops were run by Jordanian businessmen who were merely referencing the Syrian brand to promote their businesses. The Damascene bookshops owner and printing industrialist no4 explained why he thought the relationship between the Jordanians and the Syrians were comparatively better,

Jordanians used to consider Syria as heaven. Jordan imports almost everything from abroad, including from Syria. Before the war, Jordanians even depended on smuggled meat from Syria. So the Jordanians are not unfamiliar with our products. Furthermore, the Jordanians used to come to Damascus for weekends to go shopping. They have very good impressions of Syrians.⁴³²

Business practices

⁴³⁰ Kunafa is a popular Middle Eastern dessert made with white cheese, vermicelli, and sugar syrup.

⁴³¹ Observation.

⁴³² Damascene bookshops owner and printing industrialist no4, personal interview, Amman, August 13, 2015.

Different business practices in local communities also affected the settlement process for the Syrian businessmen once they had established their businesses in the host countries. Since the local businessmen in some cases had specific ways of doing business, and since the Syrian businessmen also had their own ways of doing business, the Syrian businessmen needed to address this issue and adjust to the local practices. The two most frequent differences in business operations that Syrian businessmen met were the usage of cheques and the custom of a one-year duration of products returning in Egypt.

The majority of expatriate Syrian businessmen struggled with using cheques for business transactions in the three host countries. Since Syrians did not trust the banking system in Syria during the pre-revolution era, using cheques was not common. Syrian businessmen were used to doing business with cash, and they were not accustomed to receiving bank cheques, not to mention being afraid of receiving a dishonoured cheque from a stranger in an alien land. “How can we be sure the cheques are transferable into cash? And even worse, we are not in our country now. Who will help us if we receive a dishonoured check?” stated an Aleppan plastic raw material businessman no37 in Istanbul.⁴³³

Nevertheless, after the Syrian businessmen started doing business with the locals in Turkey, Egypt, and Jordan, they were required to use cheques for doing businesses in these countries, “If we are doing businesses with other Syrian or Iraqi businessmen, we can use cash. But with the locals will not do business with you unless you accept their cheques,” stated a Damascene household cleaning industrialist no25 in

⁴³³ Aleppan plastic raw material businessman no37, personal interview, Istanbul, Decdember 8, 2014.

Mersin.⁴³⁴ However, the Syrian businessmen would take certain actions to protect themselves, such as confirming with the banks immediately after receiving a cheque to make sure it was legitimate.⁴³⁵ As a precondition for using cheques, Syrian businessmen needed to have a bank account in their host country. This encouraged them to become familiar with the local banking systems. Therefore, even though Syrian businessmen used to rarely conduct business transactions by cheque or use the banking system in Syria, they had no choice but to adapt to the local customs in the host countries. As far as is evident from the 191 interviewees, none had not opened a bank account in the countries where they had relocated to.

In Egypt, local businessmen had their own ways of buying and selling goods. One Damascene clothes businessman no26 in Cairo stated that “if Egyptian businessmen order goods from you at the beginning of the year and if they do not finish selling them by the end of the year, they will return the goods to you and you need to give them back their money.”⁴³⁶ This particular way of doing businesses was not uncommon in the Egyptian business community, as I confirmed with an Egyptian businessman.⁴³⁷ However, this was new and unfamiliar to Syrian businessmen. “Even though it is weird for us, or be asked to return the money we received from a buyer, we have no choice but accept this,” stated an Aleppan carpet industrialist no38 in Cairo.⁴³⁸

⁴³⁴ Damascene household cleaning industrialist no25, personal interview, Mersin, February 8, 2015.

⁴³⁵ Interviews.

⁴³⁶ Damascene clothes businessman no26, personal interview, Cairo, October 17, 2015.

⁴³⁷ Egyptian general trade businessman no2, conversation, Cairo, October 29, 2015.

⁴³⁸ Aleppan carpet industrialist no38, personal interview, Al-Obour, November 1, 2015.

The investigation of the legal, political, and social perspectives of host countries towards Syrian businessmen demonstrates that the Syrian businessmen struggled with four major challenges while settling in, namely, assurance of entry and the legal status of residence, volatile policy changes towards Syrians, anti-Syrian political atmospheres, and different local cultures or the negative public opinion of Syrians. Nevertheless, the expatriate Syrian businessmen could still manage with these issues because of their capital and their knowledge of adapting to various local dynamics.

4.3 So, what is the plan?

After arriving in the host countries, Syrian businessmen embarked on different activities, such as establishing new businesses, participating in philanthropic or political events, or just waiting to return. Before moving on to discussing the activities that Syrian businessmen were doing and how they conducted the activities, the expectations of how long the exile would last and how their expectations affected them at the beginning of their settlement will be analysed.

Since the expectation of exile duration can affect the migrants in the host countries, as previously mentioned, exploring their expectations will help to understand why the Syrian businessmen did what they did and how they did it. Expectations at the beginning of settlement can be divided into two main types: the expectation of a quick return to Syria, and the loss of hope of returning to Syria in the near future. Even though many Syrian businessmen from the first group expected to return to Syria soon, with the escalations of conflict in Syria, many of them eventually lost hope and their expectations turned to the same as the second type.

a. Expectations and activities

My factory was worth \$5 million, and my house was worth \$2 million. Both are still in Syria. The reason I chose to open a restaurant is because it is easy to close it down and return back to Syria. Once the war is finished, the country will need people like us who have money to rebuild the country, and it means that we will be able to make more profit than now.

- A Damascene ceramic industrialist no18⁴³⁹

On the one hand, many Syrian businessmen desired a quick return to their home country at the beginning of their emigration. This was similar to what Harpviken demonstrated in his work on war-induced Afghani migrants.⁴⁴⁰ Most Syrian businessmen were expecting a short-term leave for a few days or months as a ‘holiday’ away from the conflict zone. “Even after the protest had started in Daraa in March 2011, I still imported two machines from Korea. I did not expect that the war would start or expand in the country. All of a sudden the bombing started in the rural parts of Aleppo, and we had to leave the country,” stated the Aleppan children clothes industrialist no17.⁴⁴¹ Having decided to leave Syria with the expectation of a quick return, businessmen were mentally and materially unprepared to flee when they did. As the Aleppan interior design businessman no32 stated,

⁴³⁹ Damascene ceramic industrialist no18, personal interview, Cairo. September 30, 2015.

⁴⁴⁰ Harpviken, *Social Networks and Migration*, 76.

⁴⁴¹ Aleppan children clothes industrialist no17, personal interview, Cairo, November 03, 2015.

I left Syria in the middle of 2012 because the situation in Aleppo had become very bad. It wasn't safe there anymore – the security situation was terrible and it was urgent that we flee the country. I brought my wife and my son with me along with some summer clothes. Then I drove my car from Aleppo to Gaziantep.⁴⁴²

The Syrian businessmen did not bring enough capital or possessions with them, or even all of their family members. Since the original intention was to leave for just a short stay, they did not consider starting new businesses in their 'temporary' settling countries. What they did bring with them were just the basics for short-term living.

On the other hand, although many Syrian businessmen desired a quick return as previous studies have suggested, some had already lost hope of returning in the short-term after relocating. The Damascene restaurateur no10 stated, "Since my house was bombed by the regime and my factory was destroyed through the conflict, after I gave up everything in Syria and came here in the mid-2011 [Istanbul], I used all the money I have and started the business."⁴⁴³

The two groups of businessmen also developed their activities in the host countries differently. Those who believed in a quick return remained more politically and economically conservative, such as by merely waiting or opening up a simple, small scale investment. Those who lost hope of a quick return were more actively engaged in starting up new careers, regardless of the field of investment or political activities. As confirmed by field research, many Syrian businessmen claimed that in the beginning of their time in the host countries, they assumed that they would return to

⁴⁴² Aleppan interior design businessman no32, personal interview, Gaziantep, January 05, 2015.

⁴⁴³ Damascene restaurateur no10, personal interview, Istanbul, April 17, 2014.

Syria soon, while others claimed that they did not think it is possible for them to return to Syria in the near future.

There were three main reasons for this division: the expectation of the duration of the conflict, economic property remaining in Syria, and political leanings. Even though the Syrian businessmen had different expectations of their return, they never gave up the desire to return. This conforms to one aspect of diaspora, that is, ties with its homeland during exile, as previously mentioned.

To return soon or not to return soon?

Syrian businessmen who expected a quick return believed that the uprising would be stomped by the regime, whether in few months or possibly in one or two years. As such, they did not seriously consider establishing new investments in the host countries. As the Aleppan textile industrialist no35 in Gaziantep stated,

In the beginning when we arrived here in Turkey, we did not see any sign that the protestors or the rebels were winning the revolution or that the regime was considering giving up any of its power. Since most foreign countries are not supporting the people, and the regime is brutally killing the people with the support of Iran and Russia, we expected that the regime would just win the battle soon. And the 1980's massacres conducted by Bashar's father on the people in Aleppo, Hama, and Homs were still in our minds. We knew that the son would do the same as his father. However, we were wrong about this.⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴⁴ Aleppan textile industrialist no35, personal interview, Gaziantep, December 24, 2014.

Furthermore, when the Syrian businessmen left in a rush, they did not bring most of their capital with them, but rather left it in Syria. In any case, most of the capital was not portable as it was real estate, machines, and factories. The concern about the property that they had worked for or had held in their family for decades was another important factor to keep hope of returning to Syria as it was not easy to believe that they would lose everything they had worked for. One Aleppo real estate investor no39 said,

I used to work in real estate in Aleppo. The estates I owned were valued in the millions of US dollars. However, I could not bring those estates with me to Turkey, and I did not want to sell them since the price would be extremely low. I just want to go back to Syria once the conflict is finished so I can get back my properties rather than starting a new investment here in Turkey.⁴⁴⁵

On the other hand, some businessmen had already made their decision before their departures to not return to Syria soon. This was due to economic and political considerations. Economically speaking, either their business activities in Syria were in a critical, non-redeemable state, or they needed to immediately start up factories in the host countries in order to maintain their foreign customers. Even though the conflict in Syria at the beginning of the revolution did not see large-scale damage of domestic facilities, some businessmen's facilities were indeed totally destroyed by the war and militias, especially facilities that were located in the rural areas of the country. "My factories were all gone! They were bombed by the regime's missiles! What can I do in Syria? I have no expectation of returning to Syria in the near future," stated a Damascene box industrialist no27.⁴⁴⁶ This kind of damage made many Syrian

⁴⁴⁵ Aleppo real estate investor no39, personal interview, Mersin, February 6, 2015.

⁴⁴⁶ Damascene box industrialist no27, personal interview, 6th of October, October 15, 2015.

businessmen gave up the idea of returning to Syria, since their unmovable estates such as houses, factories, or machines have been severely destroyed or occupied through the conflict. As for the Syrian businessmen who attempted to maintain their foreign customers, specifically the industrialists, they immediately established factories in the host countries. The Aleppan packaging industrialist no34 who used to have customers in other Middle Eastern countries after he relocated from Aleppo to Gaziantep in the end of 2012 immediately established his factory for continuing businesses with his foreign customers.⁴⁴⁷

In addition to the economic considerations, the businessmen who did not hope to return quickly at the beginning of their settlement were also influenced by their political leanings about the revolution. Some Syrian businessmen left Syria due to the political suppressions from the regime because their pro-revolutionary activities or their overt anti-regime family history made them targets of the regime. As previously shown, some Syrian businessmen actively participated in the revolution and were either imprisoned or declared to be wanted by the regime. Those Syrian businessmen did not expect to return to Syria soon since they could not return – the ‘political crimes’ they or their families have committed during and before the revolution left them eligible to be arrested by the regime’s forces.

It is worth mentioning that the number of businessmen with the two types of expectations in Turkey, Egypt, and Jordan were significantly different. Most Egypt and Jordan-based Syrian businessmen did not expect a quick return, but the Turkey-based Syrian businessmen did, whether at the beginning of their settlement or

⁴⁴⁷ Aleppan packaging industrialist no34, personal interview, Istanbul, April 3, 2015.

later. During fieldwork in Egypt and Jordan, I did not meet or hear of any Syrian businessmen claiming that they were waiting to return to Syria, or whose friends were waiting to return to Syria, or who did not have any economic investment in Egypt or Jordan. The opposite was true in Turkey where the number of Syrian businessmen who were just waiting there and not setting up any economic investment was much higher than in Egypt and Jordan.

This difference was mainly due to: cheaper costs of establishing an investment in Egypt and Jordan than in Turkey, and the familiarity with the local societies. First, since most businessmen lost a great amount of capital, the high cost in Turkey would limit their motivation to establish a new investment project. As mentioned earlier about the cost of establishing a company and local tax, and the labour cost in Turkey, Egypt, and Jordan, the latter two countries cheaper cost enhanced the expatriate Syrian businessmen's motivations for starting new investments. Second, Egypt and Jordan are both Arabic countries so Syrian businessmen based in Egypt or Jordan who wanted to embark on a new business project would not encounter cultural issues, such as the language barrier in Turkey. As the Damascene clothes businessman no11 who had moved to Cairo stated, "It's just like Syria here. We speak the same language, we have the same culture. And Egypt is bigger, they have a larger population. And the taxes here are lower [than in Syria]."⁴⁴⁸ These two reasons encouraged the expatriate Syrian businessmen to start new investments in Egypt and Jordan since the risk would be lower than opening a business in Turkey where they would have to pay more and where they were not familiar with the local culture. This also made those Syrian businessmen to have less intentions of a quick return to Syria, since they could

⁴⁴⁸ Damascene clothes businessman no11, personal interview, Cairo, October 07, 2015.

establish new investments easier in the host countries. It was due to the expectations of the conflict, the economic structure of the countries into which they relocated, and the political leanings that those expatriate Syrian businessmen did not have quick return expectations as Harpviken has suggested.⁴⁴⁹

Different minds, different ends: waiting, investment, and politics

The two opposing expectations that Syrian businessmen had of returning to Syria led them to have different activities in the host countries. These activities in the host countries can be mainly divided into three groups: waiting without doing anything or working on a small-scale business, economic investment and political participation.

The businessmen who were looking for a quick return were very low-key and never fully engaged in starting new activities in the host countries. The businessmen who had given up the idea of returning to Syria in the near future had the opposite scenario whereby they needed to actively embark on new activities for their new life in the host countries.

During field research in Mersin, Turkey in 2014, I visited the ‘Syrian Businessmen Forum in Mersin’ and interviewed four businessmen. Even though the place was called ‘Businessmen Forum,’ and more than thirty businessmen were there that night, the location of the Forum was in a large café restaurant close to the beach and not in a business-formal setting.

⁴⁴⁹ Harpviken, *Social Networks and Migration*, 76.
200

The Forum was first established in 2013 by some Aleppan businessmen who had moved to Mersin in 2012. The original intention was to use it as a public place for Syrian businessmen to gather. Nevertheless, the Forum became more of a café rather than a place to discuss serious issues. The Aleppan automobile industrialist no21 was one of the founding members of this Forum. He brought me there and arranged interviews. He explained, “Even though most businessmen sitting here are millionaires in Syria, they do not do any work. Rather they have coffee or play *ṭaāwila* (a Syrian table game).”⁴⁵⁰

The businessmen in the Forum were an example of those who had enough capital with them but were not thinking about anything but returning to Syria. As an Aleppan real estate investor no40 who was a millionaire before the war stated, “Why should I work? My properties in Syria are worth more than a million US dollars. You see, the war is going to end soon, and we will start to work at that time.”⁴⁵¹ This attitude of waiting and not doing anything was common for some Syrian businessmen at the beginning of their settlement.

As mentioned previously, other Syrian businessmen who also expected a quick return still worked on small projects like a restaurant, dessert shop, or café. The reason to work was not that they would make a profit during their stay, but rather it seemed like something to do to kill time before returning to Syria. Moreover, these businessmen did not participate in any political activities at the beginning of their settlement because of their expectations – they believed the Bashar regime would stay in power.

⁴⁵⁰ Aleppan automobile industrialist no21, personal interview, Mersin, February 04, 2015.

⁴⁵¹ Aleppan real estate investor no40, personal interview, Mersin, February 6, 2015.

As such, the ‘cleaner’ their record was during this ‘waiting period’, the simpler it would be to return to Syria.

On the other hand, the Syrian businessmen who did not expect to return to Syria soon, acted in a completely different way. Economically speaking, these businessmen established companies, factories, and workshops as soon as they had entered the host countries. Since some no longer hoped to regain their estates in Syria and some knew that their lives would be in risk in Syria under the rule of Bashar, they realised that they settle in to start making profit and maintain their former foreign customers. Politically, since some Syrian businessmen left due to their political leanings, they continued their political participation in anti-regime activities in their host countries. For example, some were founding members of anti-regime political organisations which I will discuss their political participation in chapter 6.⁴⁵²

In the early stages of the expatriate Syrian businessmen’s settlement in host countries, there were opposing ideas regarding return to Syria which were due to different expectations of the end of conflict in Syria, economic properties in Syria, and political participation after the eruption of the 2011 revolution. Different points of view also led them to different activities in their host countries. Nevertheless, the ‘quick return’ businessmen changed their stance once the conflict went stalemate and dashed their hopes of returning to their homeland.

b. Transition: from sojourners to settlers

⁴⁵² Interviews.

As mentioned above, there were originally two opposing schools of thought as to when it would be possible to return to Syria. However, the majority of businessmen who expected to return soon gradually shifted to the realisation that they were in for a long-term residence abroad. It is not possible to pinpoint when their beliefs changed since each businessman had his own economic and political conditions and had had different experiences during expatriation. However, due to the prolonged conflict and the complications of battles, the businessmen realised that they would not be returning to Syria for a long time.

Generally speaking, mid-2012, mid-2013, and the beginning of 2014 can be seen as the three major turning points in the expatriate Syrian businessmen's expectations to return to Syria. In mid-2012, the conflict between the rebels and the regime forces reached a critical point which threatened the regime's political authority. The rebels attacked prominent al-Assad regime leaders in Damascus on 18 July 2012, they occupied economic and military strategic areas in Aleppo, and the regime reacted with harsher suppressions of civilians.⁴⁵³ The battles between both sides of the regime forces and the rebels caused great damage to the economic facilities inside Syria whereby many properties of Syrian businessmen were destroyed.

Furthermore, the expansion of ISIS in the northeast region of Syria in mid-2013 was another turning point for the businessmen since most of their transportation routes were blocked by ISIS.⁴⁵⁴ This blockade impeded the businessmen from transporting their resources and their economic activities in Syria to a halt. "Before ISIS seized

⁴⁵³ "Syria Conflict: Ministers 'Killed in Suicide Attack';" "ālāt ma'āmil Ḥalab wa-aṣḥābu-ha fī al-ḥarb;" "A Special Report on the Recent Air Attacks on Aleppo."

⁴⁵⁴ al-Hakkar, "The Mysterious Fall of Raqqa."

al-Raqqa in mid-2013, I could send my products from Jordan to Iraq. But now, it is too dangerous for me to send products through al-Raqqa,” stated the Aleppan plastic industrialist no26.⁴⁵⁵

Finally, 2014 was a major turning point when most Syrian businessmen lost any remain hopes of a quick return and realised they should work seriously in their host countries. At this point, the conflict had been going on for more than three years, other international players, such as Russia and Iran, were actively supporting the Bashar regime, and the U.S. was bombing ISIS in al-Raqqa. The long-term battles, lack of any winner in the foreseeable future, and the loss of the Syrian businessmen’s economic capital made them lose the last hopes of returning to Syria.⁴⁵⁶

These three turning points indicate the complications and prolongations of the Syrian conflict so that Syrian businessmen could no longer expect that the conflict would finish soon. Furthermore, the longer the conflict continued, the more damaged their properties would be, and the less hope the expatriate Syrian businessmen have for returning to Syria. As argued earlier, the expectation of a quick end to the conflict and the remnants of real estate in Syria were two reasons as to why some Syrian businessmen believed that they would return to Syria soon. Thus, the prolonged conflict changed the beliefs of those businessmen who used to think that their exile was short term.

⁴⁵⁵ Aleppan plastic industrialist no26. Personal interview. Amman, August 30, 2015.

⁴⁵⁶ Jonathan Saul and Parisa Hafezi, Iran Boosts Military Support in Syria to Bolster Assad, *Reuters*, February 21, 2014, accessed April 27, 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-crisis-iran-idUSBREA1K09U20140221>; Martha Raddatz, Luis Martinez, and Lee Ferran, Airstrikes ‘Successful’ Against ISIS Targets in Syria, US Military Says, *ABCnews*, September 23, 2014, accessed April 27, 2017, <http://abcnews.go.com/International/airstrikes-successful-isis-targets-syria-us-military/story?id=25686031>.

This transformation of beliefs directly impacted how they acted in their host countries. They started to realise that there was almost no hope of returning to Syria, or that if they did return, there would be no physical assets left. The businessmen became much more active in the host countries. In addition to economic enlargement, most continuously devoted their time and money to philanthropic activities. Some expatriate Syrian businessmen started to actively engage in anti-Assad political activities. The following two chapters will discuss these expatriate Syrian businessmen's activities in the host countries.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the relocation and settlement of Syrian businessmen from Syria to three host countries. It has demonstrated that the decision-making process for a place to relocate to for Syrian businessmen was mainly affected by the distance between the host country and Syria, the economic structures of the host countries, the political relationships between the host governments and the Syrian government, and existing social ties. After the businessmen relocated, they encountered issues of entry and residence, uncertain policy changes towards Syrians, anti-Syrian atmospheres, and different local cultures and negative public opinions about them. Even though at the beginning of their settlement process most Syrian businessmen expected a quick return to Syria because they thought that the conflict would end soon and they would still have great amounts of property in Syria, the escalations and prolongation of conflict caused them to gradually give up their hopes of returning to Syria in the near future.

This suggests that the relocation and settlement process of Syrian businessmen was mainly affected by economic, political, and social conditions of the host countries. More importantly, the political relations between the host and home governments regarding the relocation of the migrants have been argued to play an important role in addition to other factors including distance, economic structures in the host countries, and personal ties. And when both host and home governments had a similar political attitude towards the on-going Syrian conflict, the host governments might be less willing to receive Syrians, and vice versa. The Syrian businessmen's political activities in the host countries were also directly affected by these relationships since it is not possible for Syrian businessmen to participate in political activities which are against the host governments.

Different from previous studies which suggest the importance of social networks on migrants' choice of place of relocation, the case of Syrian businessmen's relocation shows that economic consideration played a more important role than social networks did during the process of relocation. This has been shown in cases of brothers and business partners choosing different countries due to the calculation of their own investments.

Finally, even though most Syrian businessmen believed their stays were temporary in the beginning, as former studies have suggested, the expectation of a temporary stay was not fixed. Rather, the complications and prolongation of conflict made them realise that the chance of returning to Syria in the short term was low. This shift of attitudes from sojourners to settlers would also influence their work and engagement

in the host countries. The following two chapters will discuss how the expatriate Syrian businessmen started to seriously engage in their economic, philanthropic, and political activities in the host countries after the change of their expectations of return. Nevertheless, the hope of returning to Syria never disappeared.

Chapter 5 The Economic Investments of Syrian Businessmen: Migrated Thoughts and Actions, Network Expansion, and Adjustment of Business Behaviours

In analysing the transformation of the Syrian business community through the 2011 revolution, the situation of the business community in pre-2011 Syria has already been investigated, as has the relocation and settlement of the Syrian businessmen. Since the expectations of the businessmen changed from patiently waiting for a quick return to understanding that they might have long-term stays, they started to seriously engage in different activities in the host countries.

This chapter will focus on the economic investment of expatriate Syrian businessmen in the host countries, and the following chapter will examine their philanthropic and political activities. After accepting their long-term exile in foreign lands, most Syrian businessmen embarked on various economic investments. The types of investment were diversified and varied in size, from small and medium sized ventures (such as grocery shops, cafés, restaurants, or trading companies) to large investments in construction and industrial fields. Also, the number of Syrian registered companies and the economic capital that they brought with them from Syria had spectacularly high economic value.

First, the state of the economic investment of expatriate Syrian businessmen in Turkey, Egypt, and Jordan will be delineated. The sizes and scales of the investments in these three countries will be examined, including the number of Syrian companies, the sectors of investments, and the capital inflow from the Syrian business community

on local societies. Second, business operations of the expatriate Syrian businessmen will be examined. Most Syrian businessmen worked in the same economic fields after their relocations, and economic, social, and political factors determined whether they would have enough trust to build up business partnerships with their fellow business countrymen or not. Third, even though Syrian businessmen left Syria, their ties to the home country – including the Assad regime, their relatives and properties inside Syria – continued to affect their economic investment in the host countries. Fourth, even though the Syrian business networks remained fragmented and people continued to behave cautiously while in exile, the expatriate businessmen used trade fairs and telecommunication apps to strengthen and improve the fragmented networks in the host countries. Finally, due to different local dynamics in the host countries, the expatriate Syrian businessmen were required to adapt to local business culture for the sake of their business investments.

Business migrants would need to adjust the ways in which they used to conduct businesses in host countries to conform to the new environments as suggested by Harris.⁴⁵⁷ Due to the host countries' environment, the Syrian businessmen needed to adjust some of their former business practices and get used to the different institutions in the host countries. Nevertheless, examining the expatriate Syrian businessmen's economic investment will show that, in addition to adaptation that expatriate Syrian businessmen have made in host countries, their previous specific ways of thinking and acting have accompanied them and continued to affect their business operations in the host countries. After assessing threats by the Syrian regime or when they could not engage with local institutions, they would seek help from their previous civil

⁴⁵⁷ Harris, "Entrepreneurship Amongst Polish Migrants in the West Midlands."

mechanisms (such as non-interest loans or informal arbitration) or rely on their previous ways of thinking to protect their own interests. Furthermore, the networks still maintained fragmented and they continued to apply other pre-2011 civil mechanisms in their business life while in exile. Despite the reality of lacking capital in the host countries while expecting that business would improve, many Syrian businessmen attempted to overcome the fragmented trust in the business community and build up new networks and associations with other expat Syrian businessmen. This indicates that the Syrian business networks were gradually expanding during this transformation, and political, economic, and social considerations were the three main criteria for improving trust among expatriate Syrian businessmen.

5.1 State of the economic investment of expatriate Syrian businessmen

Turkey has official data accessible that can help to provide a clearer picture of Syrian businessmen's investment in Turkey, whereas the data of economic investments of Syrian businessmen in Egypt and Jordan are mostly based on news and official announcements. After the eruption of the 2011 revolution, thousands of Syrian businessmen left Syria taking \$10 billions out of Syria. Moreover, thousands of Syrian companies have been established in these three countries. In Turkey Syrian businessmen mainly conducted commercial investments, whereas in Egypt and Jordan they had mainly industrial investments.

a. Turkey

In Turkey, most Syrian businessmen's business took place in Turkey's economic capital, Istanbul, as well as other metropolitan cities such as Bursa, Mersin, and Gaziantep, and the Turkish-Syrian border city of Kilis. The reasons that these five cities were the main destinations for the Syrian businessmen were because of distance or the potential for profit that these locations could bring. The close distance between Gaziantep, Mersin, and Kilis, to the northern part of Syria would only take a few hours of travel. As such, the close distance encouraged Syrian businessmen who attempted to continue business with Syria or the neighbouring countries. Furthermore, the port in Mersin was also a hub for goods transportation to Syria and other countries. Also, most of these cities were metropolitan cities in Turkey (except Kilis), whose economic environments also attracted Syrian businessmen.

As shown below in table 5.2, there were only 112 Syrian companies in Istanbul, Mersin, and Gaziantep before 2011. However, between 2011 and 2014, 1,608 Syrian companies were established in these three cities, meaning the number of Syrian companies grew 14 times in these four years. Table 5.1 indicates the extreme growth of Syrian registered companies in Turkey since 2012. Data from the Turkish Ministry of the Economy indicates that by the end of June 2016, there were 49,933 companies in Turkey with foreign capital, and 4,823 of them were Syrian, meaning nearly one out of ten companies with foreign capital in Turkey was Syrian.⁴⁵⁸ The actual numbers of Syrian companies in Turkey should be higher since some businessmen

⁴⁵⁸ List of Companies with Foreign Capital in Turkey - As of June 2016, *Turkish Ministry of Economy*, accessed November 15, 2016, [http://www.economy.gov.tr/portal/faces/oracle/webcenter/portalapp/pages/content/docListViewer.jspx?folder=/Contribution%20Folders/web_en/Home/FDI/Statistic/Foreign%20Direct%20Investment%20\(FDI\)/%parentPage=ihracat&_afLoop=268213112339082&_afWindowMode=0&_afWindowId=16e qilfxaw_26](http://www.economy.gov.tr/portal/faces/oracle/webcenter/portalapp/pages/content/docListViewer.jspx?folder=/Contribution%20Folders/web_en/Home/FDI/Statistic/Foreign%20Direct%20Investment%20(FDI)/%parentPage=ihracat&_afLoop=268213112339082&_afWindowMode=0&_afWindowId=16e qilfxaw_26).

registered their companies either using their second nationalities or under the names of their foreign business partners.

Chart 5.1 demonstrates that 54% of Syrian companies in Turkey were working in wholesale and retail trade, 9% construction, 9% transportation, 9% manufacturing, 6% real estates, and 13 % in other business activities. The reason that most Turkey-based Syrian businessmen were working in the commercial sector was because the already strong local industrialists in Turkey which made it difficult for the newly arrived Syrians who had just experienced a great loss of capital to establish industrial activities. “We cannot compete with the Turkish industrialists since costs here are much higher, and it requires more capital to establish a factory, especially after we lost most of our capital during the war in Syria,” stated an Aleppan food industrialist no41.⁴⁵⁹ Regarding the capital that Syrian businessmen brought with them, the Turkish bank agency indicates that by 2013, Syrians had deposited \$4 billion into Turkish banks.⁴⁶⁰ At the end of 2014, “a consultancy in Mersin, estimates that some \$10 billion of Syrian money has flowed into Turkey’s southern provinces in the past three years, and most of it is now invested in business.”⁴⁶¹

⁴⁵⁹ Aleppan food industrialist no41, personal interview, Mersin, February 1, 2015.

⁴⁶⁰ Amos, “Syrian Financial Capital’s.”

⁴⁶¹ Sibel Utku Bila, Businesses Boom as Syrians Put Down Roots in Turkey, *Al-Monitor*, December 12, 2014, accessed March 16, 2017, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/12/turkey-syrians-businesses-properties.html>.

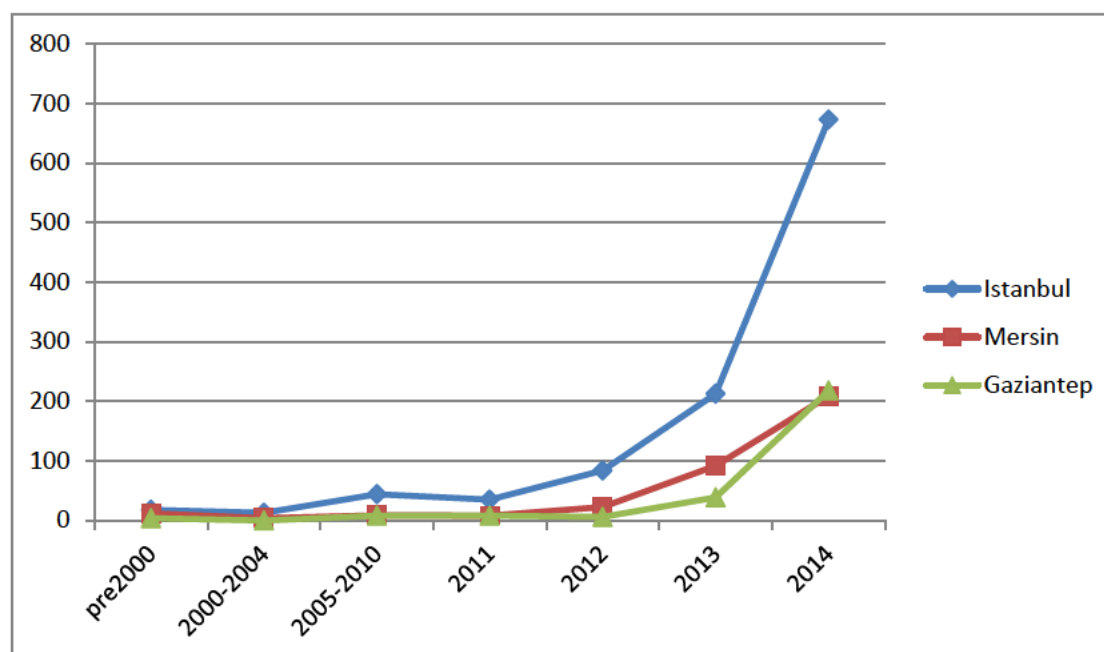


Table 5.1 Number of the Syrian companies in Istanbul, Mersin, and Gaziantep (pre-2000 to 2014)⁴⁶²

	Istanbul	Mersin	Gaziantep	Total
Pre-2000	18	12	4	
2000-2004	13	4	0	
2005-2010	44	9	8	112
2011	35	8	8	
2012	84	23	6	
2013	213	92	39	
2014	673	209	218	1608

Table 5.2 the detailed data for table 5.1

⁴⁶² The table is made by the researcher through the data from the Chamber of Commerce in Istanbul, Mersin, and Gaziantep.

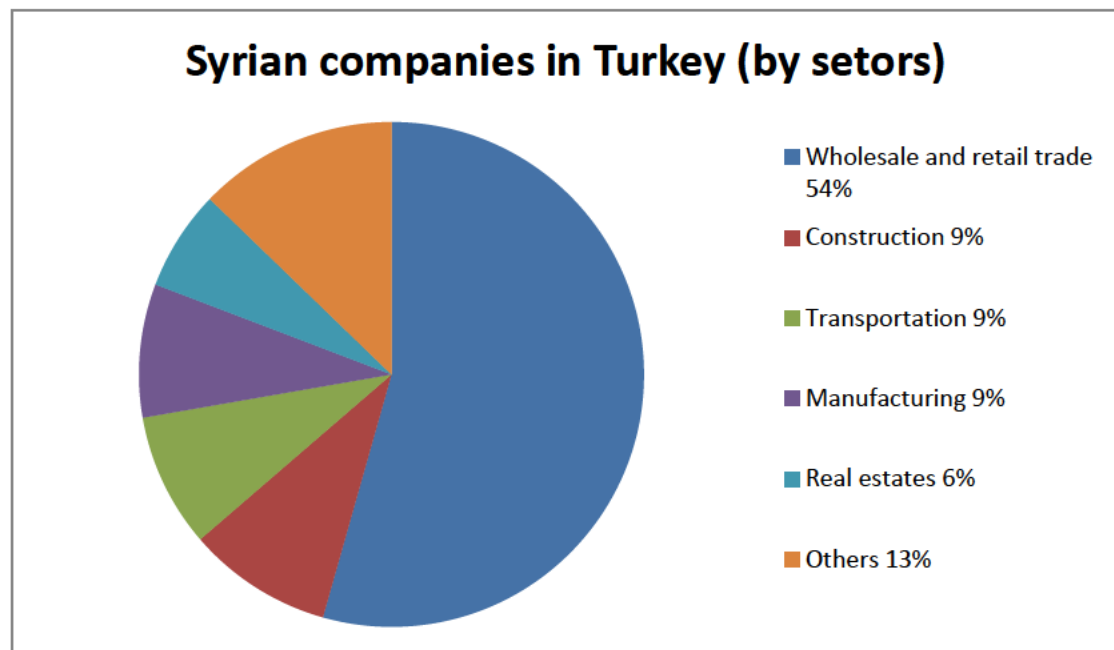


Chart 5.1 Syrian companies in Turkey by sectors⁴⁶³

b. Egypt

The investments locations of Syrian businessmen in Egypt were mainly in the Greater Cairo area and in Alexandria, the two metropolitan areas. The Greater Cairo area includes New Cairo, the 6th of October, Al-Obour, al-Badr, and the 10th of Ramadan. 6th of October, 10th of Ramadan, Al-Obour, and al-Badr were satellite cities that encircled the metropolitan area of Cairo. The satellite cities are close to the metropolitan cities so are easy for people who live in the satellite cities to commute regarding their businesses. Furthermore, 6th of October, 10th of Ramadan, Al-Obour, and al-Badr all include industrial areas that attracted Syrian industrialists who wanted to invest in these areas in order to enjoy better facilities from the local governments.

⁴⁶³ The chart is made by the researcher through the data from the Turkish Ministry of Economy, List of Companies with Foreign Capital in Turkey.

Syrian businessmen chose these Egyptian cities as their main settlement places due to the economic benefits of the metropolitan area and the satellite cities.

In December 2012, the vice chairman of the Egyptian Investment Committee Nevin El-Shafei claimed that there were 15,000 Syrian investors in Egypt who invested in various sectors, almost half in the food industry.⁴⁶⁴ In addition, the top 10 Syrian businessmen had reportedly relocated to Egypt in the same period.⁴⁶⁵ Moreover, between 1 January and 31 October 2012, Syrian businessmen established 365 companies in Egypt.⁴⁶⁶ However, the number of Syrian investments experienced a decrease due to the coup where one-third of Syrian capital moved to Turkey.⁴⁶⁷ Nevertheless, the Egyptian Syrian Business Council's president, Khaldūn al-Muwaqq', stated that the number of the Syrian industries in Egypt accounted for no less than 80% of the overall Syrian industries abroad and that most Syrian industries in Egypt were working on textiles by the end of 2015.⁴⁶⁸ The capital of Syrian businessmen in Egypt was between \$400-500 million by the end of 2012.⁴⁶⁹ Although it is not possible to calculate the exact numbers of Syrian companies in Egypt due to the lack of official statistics, news reports show that there were between hundreds and

⁴⁶⁴ “‘adad al-mustathmirīn al-Sūrīyīn fī Miṣr.”

⁴⁶⁵ Syria's Top 10 Businessmen Flee to Egypt, *Al-Arabiya News*, December 4, 2012, accessed April 03, 2017, <https://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/12/04/253308.html>.

⁴⁶⁶ “‘adad al-mustathmirīn al-Sūrīyīn fī Miṣr.”

⁴⁶⁷ “Turkiyā ‘jannat’ al-Sūrīyīn.”

⁴⁶⁸ “rajul a‘māl: Miṣr tastaw‘ib 80% min al-maṣānī’ al-Sūrīyya fī al-khārij,” [Businessman: Egypt accommodates 80% of the Syrian factories abroad] *Aliqtisadi*, November 15, 2015, accessed March 16, 2017,

<https://sy.aliqtisadi.com/698695-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%B1/>.

⁴⁶⁹ “Sūrīyā tataṣaddar al-sharikāt al-istithmāriyya fī Miṣr 2012,” [Syria tops investment companies in Egypt in 2012] *Orient-News*, December 17, 2012, accessed March 14, 2017, http://orient-news.net/ar/news_show/1091/0/%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D8%AA%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%AB%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%B1.

thousands of Syrian companies in Egypt, mainly investing in textiles and food. Syrian capital in Egypt is at least in the hundreds of millions of US dollars.

As previously mentioned, the cheap cost of labour in Egypt and Jordan, in contrast with Turkey, was one of the main reasons why Syrian businessmen were attracted to their industrial fields. As a reminder, in 2012, the minimum wage in Egypt was around \$115, and in Jordan it was around \$266, while in Turkey it was around \$443, more than one and a half times higher than in Jordan, and almost four times higher than in Egypt.⁴⁷⁰ Therefore, if the businessmen did not want to break the law and pay less than minimum wage, Egypt offered the cheapest labour, making it a financially desirable destination for Syrian businessmen to invest in.

c. Jordan

Amman, Irbid, and al-Mafraq were the main Jordanian cities where the Syrian businessmen relocated to. The reasons for choosing these cities were similar to those for Turkey: the distance and economic benefits. Amman is the primary metropolitan city and capital of Jordan so Syrian businessmen chose to settle here because living in a large city makes it easier to contact other companies, purchase goods or sell their

⁴⁷⁰ Egypt Minimum Monthly Wages, *Trading Economics*, accessed March 14, 2017, <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/egypt/minimum-wages>; Jordan, *Social Security: Office of Retirement and Disability*, accessed March 14, 2017, <https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/progdsc/ssptw/2012-2013/asia/jordan.html>; Turkey Gross Minimum Monthly Wage, *Trading Economics*, accessed March 14, 2017, <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/turkey/minimum-wages>; for Lebanon, see Lebanon Minimum Wage Rate 2017, *Minimum-wage.org*, accessed March 16, 2017, <https://www.minimum-wage.org/international/lebanon>.

products. Irbid and al-Mafrq are around 10 miles from southern Syria, which made them convenient not only for travel but also to transport goods.⁴⁷¹

Syrian companies in Jordan accounted for around 25% of the 9,024 foreign registered companies in August 2014.⁴⁷² The number of Syrian restaurants in Jordan by the end of 2014 reached 1,100 and had a total capital of about 15 million Jordanian dinars (around \$21 million).⁴⁷³ Between the beginning of 2012 and the end of 2013, there were 500 Syrian companies registered in Jordan: 44% in industry, 25.1% in service, 23.5% in trade, 7% in agriculture, and 0.4% in real estate.⁴⁷⁴ As mentioned earlier, cheap labour costs in Jordan encouraged Syrian businessmen to invest in their industrial sectors. Finally, the economic capital Syrian businessmen brought to Jordan, reached \$161 million in 2012 (around 114 million Jordanian dinars), and during the first half of 2013, a further \$69 million (around 49 million Jordanian dinars) were brought in.⁴⁷⁵

5.2 What to work on, with whom and where?

- a. Starting up business: giving up hope of return vs. still hoping to return

⁴⁷¹ 10 Miles From the Syrian Border, *Living on One*, January 19, 2014, accessed April 28, 2017, <http://livingonone.org/10-miles-syrian-border/>; Charles Sennott, Why Jordan is Reaching Its Limits with Syrian Refugees, *PRI*, February 2, 2016, accessed April 28, 2017, <https://www.pri.org/stories/2016-02-02/why-jordan-reaching-its-limits-syrian-refugees>.

⁴⁷² “sharikāt Sūriyya tuwāṣil al-hijra.”

⁴⁷³ “thaqāfa al-ṭa‘ām al-Sūrī”

⁴⁷⁴ “wujūd al-Sūrīyīn fī al-Urdunn yun‘ish al-iqtisād al-maḥḥalī,” [The presence of the Syrians in Jordan revives the local economy] *7iber*, October 23, 2013, accessed March 14, 2017, <http://7iber.com/2013/10/syrians-benefit-economy/>.

⁴⁷⁵ Syrian Businesses in Jordan A Bittersweet Opportunity, *The Economist*, August 1, 2013, accessed March 14, 2017, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/pomegranate/2013/08/syrian-businesses-jordan>.

I think people have started to get together and build up business partnerships now, like two of my business friends. One established business partnerships with ten other businessmen here [in Gaziantep] and opened restaurants; the other built up business partnerships with another four businessmen to invest in construction companies. It is a good thing for us [Syrian businessmen] to gradually trust each other.

-An Aleppo food industrialist no42⁴⁷⁶

Networks are not only important for businessmen to facilitate their business activities, they are also significant in the process of migration. However, while establishing a business in host countries, networks did not affect Syrian businessmen's decision unless they were looking for business partnerships. Once they decided to start economic investments in the host countries, they mainly invested in the same fields as they did in Syria since they were more familiar with them. Businessmen also started up in the same fields to maintain old customers they had. However, for the businessmen who were still undecided about their resettlement, opening a small sized investment such as restaurants or cafés was a good choice as previously mentioned. The Damascene ceramic industrialist no18 who used to work in the ceramics industry and now has two restaurants in Cairo stated,

I used to work in the ceramics industry, but now I've opened two restaurants and have 50 workers here in Cairo. However, once the war is finished, I will just sell the restaurants and return to Syria. Because in that time, the country will need businessmen like me who have experience and money.⁴⁷⁷

⁴⁷⁶ Aleppo food industrialist no42, personal interview, Gaziantep, January 7, 2015.

⁴⁷⁷ Damascene ceramic industrialist no18, personal interview, Cairo, September 30, 2015.

As previously mentioned, Syrian businessmen preferred running businesses by themselves or in family-oriented ventures during the pre-revolution era.⁴⁷⁸ However, while establishing businesses in exile, the limited and small business partnerships had started to expand such that more than half of the interviewees had built up partnerships in host countries, mostly with other Syrians though sometimes with locals. Out of the 182 Syrian businessmen interviewed who were working in the same business sectors after their resettlement, 94 had established business partnerships, and 15 of those 94 did so with local businessmen. 88 did not have any business partnerships, or they established their businesses with relatives as a family business. This shows how the business networking of Syrian businessmen has started to transform from individually or family-oriented to partnership based.

The main reason that Syrian businessmen would build up business partnerships was because they lacked economic capital. The Syrian conflict has lasted more than six years and almost no Syrian businessman could avoid the negative effects. Many of their companies, factories or goods were occupied by either regime or rebel forces, or burnt down. The businessmen who used to work in industry experienced greater loss since their capital was mostly derived from the machines inside their factories, which were easy targets for the armed groups.

This loss of capital made the businessmen to have limited budget, and forced them to be extremely cautious when investing in new businesses in the host countries and when developing business partnerships since could not take another failure. “We only have 25% of our capital with us. All the rest is in Aleppo or has been turned into

⁴⁷⁸ Haddad, *Business Networks in Syria*, 38.

ashes,” said an Aleppan food industrialist no43.⁴⁷⁹ The Aleppan clothes industrialist no13 who relocated to Gaziantep claimed that his economic capital used to be \$4 million before the revolution, but now he only has one tenth of that with him. In the end, the lack of capital was a double-edged sword.⁴⁸⁰ On the one hand, it had increased the individualism for some Syrian businessmen. On the other hand, other businessmen had no choice but to start business partnerships if they wanted to continue working.

In order to choose a place to restart their businesses, it is understandable that Syrian businessmen would choose places that were already popular for certain business activities. In addition, Syrian businessmen who had already relocated played a role in encouraging and facilitating newly arrived businessmen to pick a place for their investments. Previous migration studies argue that the existing networks in host countries facilitate and encourage people to migrate to the places where their acquaintances are located.⁴⁸¹ When the expatriate Syrian businessmen decided to seek help from their existing networks or other fellow business countrymen, they specifically went to other expatriate Syrian businessmen who came from the same hometown. When choosing a location, new expatriate Syrian businessmen would seek help from personal acquaintances who had already been living in the host countries for a long time. Nevertheless, this help was mostly basic and non-financial. The

⁴⁷⁹ Aleppan food industrialist no43, personal interview, Gaziantep, January 21, 2015.

⁴⁸⁰ Aleppan clothes industrialist no13, personal interview, Gaziantep, May 28, 2014.

⁴⁸¹ Monica Boyd, “Family and Personal Networks in International Migration: Recent Developments and New Agendas,” *The International Migration Review*, 23, no.3 (1989): 645; Michael P. Smith, Bernadette Tarallo, and George Kagiwada, “Colouring California: New Asian Immigrant Households, Social Networks and the Local State,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 15, no.2 (1991): 254; Nasra M. Shah and Indu Menon, “Chain Migration Through the Social Network: Experience of Labour Migrants in Kuwait,” *International Migration*, 37, no.2 (1999): 370; Joaquin Arango, “Explaining Migration: A Critical View,” *International Social Science Journal* (2000): 291; Sutama Ghosh, “Transnational Ties and Intra-immigrant Group Settlement Experiences,” *GeoJournal*, 68, no. 2 (2007): 225.

dozens of Syrian shops in Gesr El Suez in Cairo was an example of how former acquaintance influence choosing the place for business. An Aleppan⁴⁴ traditional Arab clothes industrialist explained how previously resident Syrian businessman helped the later arrivals settle in the area,

There are around 63 Syrian shops in Gesr El Suez now, whereas before 2011, there was only one Aleppan businessman who opened a shop there 20 years ago. And because his relatives in Aleppo were thinking about coming to Egypt, they contacted him first. Then this businessman helped them to open another shop in Gesr El Suez. Later on, other businessmen also went to this businessman's relatives for advice. Then the Syrian businessmen started to gather there. Of course, they are mostly Aleppans.⁴⁸²

Another Aleppan general trade businessman no45 who started his businesses in Mersin in the 1980s claimed that once the Syrian businessmen started to come to Turkey, he did not hesitate to give them information about how to run businesses inside Turkey.⁴⁸³

This non-financial yet still information-based help from the Syrian businessmen who had already begun investing in the host countries decades ago also existed in Jordan. Another Damascene money transfer businessman no28 had been investing in Jordan since the early 2000s stated that he too helped Syrian businessmen who arrived in Jordan after 2011 with their livelihoods and business investments.⁴⁸⁴ Nevertheless, this kind of supports from the long-term expatriate Syiran businessmen to the newly

⁴⁸² Aleppan traditional Arab clothes industrialist no44, personal interview, Cairo, October 31, 2015.

⁴⁸³ Aleppan general trade businessman no45, personal interview, Mersin, February 2, 2015.

⁴⁸⁴ Damascene money transfer businessman no28, personal interview, Amman, August 05, 2015.

arrived Syrian businessmen only played a minor role regarding their new investments in the host countries.

b. Building up partnerships: unpacking the trust among Syrian businessmen

Most people here who meet up are mostly either relatives or were friends before the war.

-An Aleppan clothes businessman no46⁴⁸⁵

There are various factors that influenced Syrian businessmen in choosing partnerships. Nevertheless, trust was the most crucial criterion. The exploration of the business partnerships suggests that Syrian businessmen might build up business partnerships if they worked in the same field of investments (economic); they had known each other for a long time, they could be assured of the other person's reputations, they had been business partners previously or they had had business interactions previously (social); and they did not hold opposing political opinions about the revolution in Syria (political). Out of the 94 Syrian businessmen who had built up business partnerships in the host countries, none of them had opposing political opinions to their business partners. These factors suggest that the businessmen built up business partnerships because of the potential economic interests they could gain and the trust which they had or could have with each other.

Although previous studies on Syrian businessmen did not say much about the political opinions of the Syrian business community, this situation has changed since the

⁴⁸⁵ Aleppan clothes businessman no46, personal interview, Mersin, February 5, 2015.

eruption of the revolution in 2011 and has led to a division of political opinions in the Syrian business community. The difference of political opinion significantly affected the ways Syrian businessmen would interact with each other. The clearest example is in the interactions between the anti-regime businessmen and the pro-regime businessmen, as well as in the interactions between the self-proclaimed neutral businessmen with the other two groups. “We know some business family have split into two because of their different political ideas. And even brothers are not contacting each other because of different political opinions about the incident in Syria,” stated the Aleppan automobile industrialist no21.⁴⁸⁶

When the revolution started, some businessmen decided to stand up and aid the popular uprising. Most ended up being wanted by the regime or else they paid bribes to sneak out of Syria after a period of imprisonment. However, they did not achieve what they were demanding, which was the fall of the Assad regime. They left Syria with their capital and accompanied by their relatives, as well as with resentment of the regime and resentment of their fellow business countrymen who remained silent during the 2011 revolution. One Latakia food trading and clothes industrialist no2 and who was also a member of the Syrian Business Forum stated that, “did you see other people dare to put this flag (the three starred flag) in their office? No! Because they are opportunists! They just care about themselves. And I look down on this kind of people who consent tacitly to the unjust regime and I will not meet any of these people.”⁴⁸⁷ He further emphasised that he would never sell his products or do any business with pro-regime businessmen.⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸⁶ Aleppan automobile industrialist no21, personal interview Mersin, February 04, 2015.

⁴⁸⁷ Latakia food trading and clothes industrialist no2, personal interview, Mersin, February 11, 2015.

⁴⁸⁸ Latakia food trading and clothes industrialist no2, personal interview, Mersin, February 11, 2015.

At the time, the pro-regime businessmen considered the anti-regime businessmen to be ‘traitors’ of the country. “These people (the anti-regime businessmen) are supporting the terrorists. They did not help their country to fight the terrorists, rather they support this Western-led plan trying to destroy our country,” stated a pro-regime Damascene household goods industrialist no29 in Amman.⁴⁸⁹ Both the anti- and pro-regime businessmen proclaimed they were right and denounced the others as vicious traitors. The pro-regime businessmen condemned the anti-regime businessmen as ‘betrayers,’ and the anti-regime businessmen considered the other group as the henchmen of the regime. The clash of political opinions stopped these two groups from staying in contact with one another. In particular, the anti- and pro-regime businessmen despised each other’s actions during the revolution. Differing political beliefs affected how businessmen interacted with each other. They preferred not to be related to or be in contact with any businessmen who were publicly known for their political beliefs. As such, when a Syrian businessman was looking for a business partner, he would never look for someone from the other side.

Self-proclaimed neutral businessmen were extremely careful when interacting with businessmen from these two groups. One Aleppan textile businessman no47 stated,

We are businessmen and we just care about our business. One time my customer came into the store and started to talk about politics. I told him if he wanted to talk about politics then he should please leave the premises. We only deal with businesses here, not politics.⁴⁹⁰

⁴⁸⁹ Damascene household goods industrialist no29, personal interview, Amman, July 23, 2015.

⁴⁹⁰ Aleppan textile businessman no47, personal interview, Istanbul, November 30, 2014.

The self-proclaimed neutral businessmen have an understanding when they interact with the others that they will not mention anything that might express political belief.

The reason why different political opinions affected the networking of expatriate Syrian businessmen in host countries was the fear of retaliation. The situation in Syria is still unstable and no one is sure which side will win out in the end. Even though Syrian businessmen have their own interpretations and political opinions on the future of Syria, they worried that if they exposed their opinions – which turned out to be on the ‘wrong’ side at the end – they might stay in exile forever. The *mukhabarat* system increased this uncertainty for anti-regime businessmen since no one was certain about another person’s political stance. The pro-regime businessmen were also afraid if their current patronage lost the battle, a new regime would punish them for supporting the Assad regime. They were also worried that the rebel groups might kidnap them while they were abroad. Self-proclaimed neutral businessmen were too afraid to be associated with any political discussion about Syria.

In addition to the political consideration, the economic interests they could create and a certain amount of trust in each other were the other two factors which facilitated business partnerships. Syrian businessmen would choose business partnerships with the people who were working in the same field because they would be more familiar with the specifics of that area. However, the same economic field alone was not sufficient; they had to have enough information on the other businessmen’s backgrounds.

As shown previously, the roots of another businessman – mainly their city of origin and family names – would affect how Syrian businessmen judged one another. Now that Syrian businessmen were considering business partnerships in their host countries, city origin and family name still taken into consideration, but so as a background check. During the interview with the brother of a former vice president of the Aleppan Chamber of Industry – Aleppan food industrialist no2, another plastic trading businessman who had been considered one the top 10 businessmen in the plastic field in Syria came up in discussion. The brother of the former vice president called a friend to ask about the plastic businessman’s activities in Syria. The conversation included not only economic activities but also his relationship with the Syrian regime. After finishing on the phone, he explained, “my friend told me I cannot trust that guy. He used to be dishonest with his business dealing.”⁴⁹¹

To make sure they could trust a business partner, Syrian businessmen would choose to build up partnerships mostly with people who they knew or used to work with before leaving Syria. Moreover, they usually chose businessmen who were from the same city as they were. By doing so, confirming the reputations of another businessman would be easier. Only 6 interviewees out of 94 had business partners who were from different cities. Out of these 6 interviewees, 2 were from Aleppo and Damascus but based in Turkey; 1 Turkey-based Homs food industrialist had an Aleppan business partner; 1 Turkey-based Aleppan food industrialist had a Turkey-Homs industrialist partner; 1 Egypt-based Damascene clothes industrialist had an Aleppan business partner; and 1 Jordan-based Daraa food industrialist had an Aleppan business partner. In these cases, it was because those businessmen used to have business interactions

⁴⁹¹ Aleppan food industrialist no2, personal interview, Gaziantep, February 02, 2015.

inside Syria prior to the year of 2011 which they have already known each other for a longer period and have a basis of trust for building up the business partnerships. The businessmen's economic activities were affected not only by what they thought of their fellow business countrymen, but also by the role of their home country.

5.3 Homeland factors: migrated thoughts and actions, and transnational ties

Even though the Syrian businessmen left Syria, their home country still played an important factor which affected their business activities in the host countries. Civil mechanisms (non-interest loans and informal arbitrations) which were developed by Syrian businessmen as a result of poor institutions have already been examined in chapter 2. After resettlement, the businessmen continued to depend on and applying these mechanisms in their business operations. Furthermore, the fear of the regime was still prevalent in the minds of the expatriate businessmen. This further impeded networking for businessmen who were scrupulous about interacting with their fellow country businessmen. Finally, the ties of family and immovable property in Syria constrained the businessmen's economic activities in the host countries. This suggests that the Syrian businessmen had moved away from Syria physically, but that their specific thoughts and actions about doing businesses and about the Syrian regime accompanied them and stayed almost exactly the same, due to the difficulty in engaging with the local institutions and assessment of possible damage the regime might do to them. In addition, the homeland factor rose to a transnational level which affected their economic activities in the host countries.

- a. The application of former civil mechanisms: non-interest loans and informal

arbitration

My restaurant was intentionally damaged by a Turkish taxi driver due to some misunderstanding. Although I have Turkish citizenship, and I sued him in the [Turkish] court providing all the evidence, the judgment result was that he was innocent. How will you expect me to go to the court here? In the end, I'm still a foreigner in their [Turkish judges'] eyes.

-An Aleppan furniture industrialist no33⁴⁹²

When expatriate Syrian businessmen have issues of money or business disputes, they seek help using the same civil mechanisms which they depended on in pre-revolution Syria. When a Syrian businessman arrived in a host country with a need for capital to establish new investments, seeking help from his former business friends for a non-interest loan was still an option. Although Syrian businessmen relocated to different cities in different countries, the application of this non-interest loan was the same. The Aleppan plastic industrialist no26 in Amman contacted his former Aleppan businessman friend who was a raw materials provider in Istanbul for financial help at the end of 2012 to set up a factory in Jordan. "He lent me all the machines I needed in the beginning without any charge. The machines he lent me were worth more than \$1 million. Later on, I returned the money to him after I started to make profit."⁴⁹³ Another similar case was the Aleppan plastic industrialist no9. He relocated to 6th of October in Egypt in mid-2012. With the help of his former Aleppan business friend who was working in machines trading and who had relocated to Gaziantep, Turkey,

⁴⁹² Aleppan furniture industrialist no33, personal interview, Gaziantep, May 22, 2014.

⁴⁹³ Aleppan plastic industrialist no26. Personal interview. Amman, August 30, 2015.

he also received machines without paying at the beginning.⁴⁹⁴ Non-interest loans were not restricted to machines, but could also be cash. These non-interest loans were still common among expatriate Syrian businessmen.

In addition to the non-interest loans, the informal arbitrations were another civil mechanism which the expatriate Syrian businessmen used to arrange a dispute. When a business dispute arose, businessmen would do as they had done in Syria during the pre-revolution era: they would not seek a solution from the local judicial system but they would form a civil court by themselves. The Aleppan real estate investor no20 in Mersin, Turkey stated,

A Syrian buyer and I had a business dispute regarding our transactions in Turkey. Even though we were both legally registered companies in Turkey, we did not go to the local court to solve the problem. We both found another two Syrian businessmen who we trusted, one was from my side and the other was from his side. Then we invited another Syrian businessman who also had knowledge of sharia'. Then the five of us sat down and discussed the justice was with whom.⁴⁹⁵

Since the Syrian businessmen were the new settlers in the host countries, they were afraid of accessing the local court and would not trust the local judicial system. An Aleppan tanker industrialist no49 explained his worries about the local courts,

How long will it take for arbitration here in Turkey? Three months? Five months? Or even longer? It's not only because it may take a long time to get the result of the arbitration, but also, we want to be 'clean,' – we do not want to have any negative judicial labels from the country we live in now after we leave. God knows what will happen then.⁴⁹⁶

⁴⁹⁴ Aleppan plastic industrialist no9. Personal interview. 6th of October. October 13, 2015.

⁴⁹⁵ Aleppan real estate investor no20. Personal interview. Adana. April 15, 2015.

⁴⁹⁶ Aleppan tanker industrialist no49, personal interview, Gaziantep, January 13, 2015.

Thus, the Syrian businessmen used the same informal arbitration mechanism in the host countries when they had business disputes with their fellow business countrymen. Nevertheless, the application of these civil mechanisms as limited to Syrian businessmen who had already known each other or trusted each other enough and were from the same cities before their expatriation.

b. The fear of the regime – living in its shadow

Trust me my friend, all my friends think the Syrian mukhabarat sent you here.

-An Aleppan dessert industrialist no50⁴⁹⁷

After meeting the above Aleppan industrialist, he promised that he would try to arrange some interviews with other Syrian business friends of his. However, he called after three days and apologised. It seems that the notoriety of the Syrian *mukhabarat* in the Syrian businessmen' minds was almost infinite. The expatriate Syrian businessmen thought that the Syrian *mukhabarat* would recruit a Taiwanese person to work for them and spy on their people.

The Syrian businessmen had dreaded the regime since they had been in Syria. This fear made distrust each other such that anyone could be from the *mukhabarat* or be sent by them. They did not overcome this fear by being far away from the regime. Rather, it stayed in their minds and continually limited their networking, even in an strictly economic setting. For example, a Syrian businessman was kidnapped in

⁴⁹⁷ Aleppan dessert industrialist no50, personal interview, 6th of October, October 15, 2015.

August 2014 in Gaziantep, and some Syrian businessmen believed it was directly linked to the *mukhabarat*, even though there was no further information about who had done the kidnapping.⁴⁹⁸ The power of the Syrian *mukhabarat* in the minds of Syrian businessmen reached a certain level of ‘omnipresence.’ The Damascene general trade businessman no19 in Istanbul explained that he was looking for a business investment opportunity in Turkey. I gave him the names of a few businessmen who might be willing to participate, but he immediately rejected them. The reason was, “they are anti-regime businessmen. Even though I personally do not like the regime, I need to think about my family who is still in Syria. The regime has informers all over the world, and they know who we are in touch with.”⁴⁹⁹

The fear of the regime was not merely imaginary because they did occasionally threaten businessmen even when they were physically distant. Threats from the regime on businessmen could even happen in Turkey, a country whose government was strongly anti-regime. “Some businessmen participated in a trade fair in Istanbul, and a pro-regime businessman came to them and asked why they did business in Turkey? He told them that they should do business in Syria to support their country,” stated the Damascene clothes industrialist no21.⁵⁰⁰ “Even though we are in Turkey, we still need to be careful about what we say and who we meet. Because our houses and relatives are all in Syria, if we criticise the regime or meet with opposition groups here, then all our stuff and relatives may be put in danger,” said an Aleppan textile

⁴⁹⁸ “ikhtiṭāf rajul a‘māl Ḥalabī fī Ghāzī ‘Antāb .. wa al-khāṭifūn yuṭālibūn bi-fidya,” [The kidnap of a Aleppan businessman in Gaziantep .. and the kidnappers demand a ransom] *Aksalser*, August 31, 2014, accessed March 14, 2017, http://3ksalser.com/?page=view_articles&id=499a24e670155406b280bd02703d4736; Interviews.

⁴⁹⁹ Damascene general trade businessman no19, personal interview, Istanbul, April 02, 2015.

⁵⁰⁰ Damascene clothes industrialist no21, personal interview, Istanbul, March 13, 2015.

businessman no51.⁵⁰¹ The fear of the regime was not limited to the expatriate businessmen about themselves, but they worried that their families and property estates in Syria would be at risk. As such, the fragmented network of the Syrian business community endured even though they had physically left Syria thanks to the fear of ‘omnipresent *mukhabarat*.’

c. Transnational ties of family and immovable property in Syria

I worked for almost 40 years to build up my career in Syria, to buy a villa in Aleppo. alhamdulillah, they are still in Syria. I talk with my brother who is still in Aleppo. He is more than 60 years old. Every time he tells me they have no heat or electricity in the country, I feel pained, but what can I do? This kind of emotion distracts me from concentrating on my new investment here.

-An Aleppan automobile industrialist no21⁵⁰²

As mentioned in the previous chapter, at the beginning of the exile many Syrian businessmen thought the uprising would end in few months, and therefore did not bother to carefully consider what they should bring with them. The majority departed and left their businesses and elderly family members in Syria. As the Aleppan interior design businessman no32 who was in his early thirties stated,

I drove to Turkey from Syria in the summer of 2012. At first I thought it was just a short holiday for my wife, my son, and me. The only luggage I had was just summer clothes and some cash. I did not bring my parents with me, nor the expensive printing machines I bought from Europe since I never imagined the war

⁵⁰¹ Aleppan textile businessman no51, Personal interview, Istanbul, March 30, 2015.

⁵⁰² Aleppan automobile industrialist no21, personal interview, Mersin, February 04, 2015.

would last so long. If I had known the war would continue, I would have spent a few more weeks transporting all my family and machines out of Syria.⁵⁰³

Under the context of being unprepared and making a rapid departure, most expatriate Syrian businessmen later suffered as a consequence of these transnational ties.

Transitional bonds affected the daily life of the forced migrants since supporting their family members in the home countries was their responsibility due to social pressure and could also lead to repercussions for people living abroad when sending money back home.⁵⁰⁴ Transnational bonds which restricted the activities of expatriate Syrian businessmen can also be perceived in their daily lives. The bonds made more serious impacts, especially when the conflict in the home country was still on-going, and people needed to be cautious about further possible harm they may encounter at the hands of the regime. Even though Syrian businessmen had been in exile for few years, the mental burden of separation from relatives and material assets has significantly distracted them and damaged their daily activities. One 60-year-old Aleppan art trading businessman no52 left his interview to answer a phone call. It was clear from his eyes that he had been crying. He explained,

My wife just called me from Aleppo. When I answered the phone, I said ‘hello’ to her, but she did not answer. I said ‘hello’ again and she just started to cry without saying anything. I did not know what to do so I just cried with her. She was with me in Turkey last month, but because she wanted to take care of our daughter who is still in Aleppo, she went back to Syria. But now she cannot return because the

⁵⁰³ Aleppan interior design businessman no32, personal interview, Gaziantep, January 05, 2015.

⁵⁰⁴ Al-Ali, Black and Koser, “The Limits to ‘Transnationalism’,” 591; Anna Lindley, “The Early-Morning Phonecall: Remittances from a Refugee Diaspora Perspective,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 35, No. 8 (2009): 1326-1328.

border between Turkey and Syria was shut down since ISIS is getting closer to the border.⁵⁰⁵

The separation and uncertain circumstances of relatives made the businessmen suffer. More seriously, many received calls from their family members who were still in Syria, sometimes asking for money, sometimes giving news of the loss or absence of another relative. This limited many Syrian businessmen's ability to devote themselves to the new investments in the host countries.

In addition to family ties, the majority of the Syrian businessmen still have their houses, villas, companies, or factories in Syria, with some factories or companies were still working, but just barely. It was not easy for these Syrian businessmen who had worked, for example, for more than 20 years to give up their assets so quickly. Some left behind a few family members to protect the assets since if the property was vacant it could be taken over by either side, or by armed gangs which emerged during the war. "Some of my relatives are still in Syria, and I want to visit them. My house is still there. If I do anything which could anger the regime here, then my relatives and house may be in trouble," stated an Aleppan money transfer businessman no53.⁵⁰⁶

Transnational ties between expatriate Syrian businessmen and their home country were another factor that affected Syrian businessmen since they were not just living or working for themselves, but were also struggling to protect their family members and their real estate in Syria. "If we criticise Bashar here, the government can easily send a jet to bomb our house in Syria." There was a real fear of the regime's invisible hand

⁵⁰⁵ Aleppan art trading businessman no52, personal interview, Bursa, April 7, 2015.

⁵⁰⁶ Aleppan money transfer businessman no53, personal interview, Gaziantep, January 16, 2015.

that could damage their property and family. 7 out of 31 businessmen interviewed during the mid-May to mid-June 2014 pilot fieldwork admitted to having been imprisoned before, and 4 are wanted by the regime.⁵⁰⁷

Transnational suppressions such as physical threats and verbal warnings from the Syrian intelligence service to the expatriate Syrians and their relatives within Syria make it difficult for them to build trust with each other or even to gather socially. “A businessman in Turkey told me that a few weeks before the *mukhabarat* had gone to his house in Aleppo and asked for him. His parents told them that he is in Turkey. They told his parents to warn their son not to criticise the regime on his Facebook page,” stated the Aleppan food industrialist no2.⁵⁰⁸ “If we gather here, the regime might think that we are planning to overthrow them. Even though we claim that we are gathering only for the sake of our investment,” said the Damascene household cleaning industrialist no25.⁵⁰⁹

The homeland factors and former civil mechanisms that they used to use have continuously affected the ways in which the expatriate Syrian businessmen act in their host countries. When they started to develop new business networks, they took some special facilities or occasions to improve the chances of having a comfortable environment, such as trade fairs and communication applications.

5.4 Trade fairs and communication applications (Apps)

⁵⁰⁷ Interviews.

⁵⁰⁸ Aleppan food industrialist no2, personal interview, Gaziantep, February 02, 2015.

⁵⁰⁹ Damascene household cleaning industrialist no25, personal interview, Mersin, February 8, 2015.

Although the networks of expatriate Syrian businessmen remained fragmented and people were suspicious of each other, there was a main social venue where expatriate Syrian businessmen felt more comfortable and frequently participated or gathered in to improve and build up networks. ‘Social venue’ here indicates places where dozens of businessmen may go to either as a group or as an individual. Even though fear and distrust still existed and affected their interactions with each other, for the sake of strengthening or establishing their business networks and to improve their business after resettlement, trade fairs became comparatively safe venues. It is important to examine how and why Syrian businessmen used trade fairs to sustain, reinforce or expand their connections in the context of fragmented networking. The reasons for choosing specific places for networking will be analysed, as will how to maintain distant or transnational ties with their fellow business countrymen. Looking into the expatriate Syrian businessmen’s participations in trade fairs and the use of communication Apps will indicate that even though the expatriate Syrian businessmen still had different considerations and impediments to their networking, they took advantage of different opportunities and means for improving and expanding their fragmented networks as well as improving their investments abroad.

a. Participation in trade fairs

Participating in trade fairs was an indispensable part of the Syrian businessmen’s careers. Almost all Syrian businessmen who owned companies or factories would attend trade fairs related to their investments. During fieldwork research, I personally attended four trade fairs with expatriate Syrian businessmen. I went to two trade fairs with two separate businessmen, and two additional separate groups of businessmen

brought me to two other trade fairs as a ‘Syrian guest.’ The latter two of the events lasted for more than one day, and one event included one overnight stay, and other one included two overnight stays.⁵¹⁰

The primary reason why businessmen participate in trade fairs was that they could improve their business. Syrian businessmen could not only benefit from the knowledge of markets but they could also enlarge their business networks. They might attend the event as a visitor or rent a booth for their companies. As a visitor, they would learn about the new products on the market, see who else was working in the field, and meet potential future competitors or customers. As an exhibitor, they aimed to sell their products and promote their companies’ names in the market. As such, most Syrian businessmen who owned companies or factories would attend these business exhibitions. In addition to the economic motives, the fear of the Syrian *mukhabarat* and the intention to form business organisations were the other two reasons which drove them to partake in the trade fairs.

As previously demonstrated, Syrian businessmen were afraid of the *mukhabarat*. They were vigilant at any social gatherings; any indiscretion might attract people from the *mukhabarat* to them. Trade fairs were a social venue where Syrian businessmen could perfectly justify attendance. Even in the pre-war era, it was easy to participate in exhibitions held in their country or overseas. Due to the war, business exhibitions turned into social venues where expatriate Syrian businessmen can gather. They use the opportunity as a reunion with their former business acquaintances from the same

⁵¹⁰ Observations, Istanbul, Bursa, Adana, and Gaziantep, 2014-2015.

field from different cities or countries. They have the chance to understand other countries' investment environments and to sustain friendships in other countries.

In addition, some Syrian businessmen who intended to form an expatriate Syrian business organisation used the chance to discuss, since they were usually either too busy to have these people meet, or too afraid to meet in another place. One case from a fair with around 30 Turkey-based Syrian businessmen confirms that in addition to the economic motivations of attending trade fairs, the intentions of strengthening the networks of fellow country businessmen could be observed. That is, during leisure time at one of the trade fairs, the businessmen gathered to discuss the idea and on-going project of establishing an expatriate Syrian business association. Due to the high rate of frequency of attending trade fairs, in less than a year a business association was established, with the registration of around 200 Turkey-based Syrian companies in the association.

The evening of one trade fair, around 30 Syrian businessmen who were mostly investing in the construction field, but who were based in three different Turkish cities (Istanbul, Mersin, and Gaziantep) go together to discuss the possibility of establishing a business association in Turkey. After all the Syrian businessmen sat in a circle, the Aleppan businessman, Mr K., who owned a construction company in Turkey and was also the organiser of this trade fair trip, introduced himself. He gave his own name, his former business experiences in Syria, and what he was currently working on in Turkey. He then asked the other participants to also introduce themselves while he wrote down their names and contact details. Many questions were raised at this point. "Why we need to leave this information?" asked a Syrian businessman who seemed to

be nervous about his name and contact information being written down.⁵¹¹ “I don’t like to write down my name or contact information on paper,” stated another Syrian businessman.⁵¹² Mr K. and his business partners needed to further clarify that this information would only be kept by them for arranging the second meeting.

They discussed issues such as the name of the association, its aims, administrative details, and the arrangement of another meeting at the next trade fair. Syrian businessmen also used this opportunity to exchange their experience with conducting businesses in Turkey and to provide others with information regarding legal issues or business environments. At the end of the gathering, they decided to raise their hands and vote on decisions which they had proposed. One businessman stated “no, I have no interest in politics. I do not want to raise my hand.”⁵¹³

Reactions during this gathering demonstrate that even though all the participants were comfortable with each other, when it came to writing down their personal information or voting, the Syrian businessmen might choose to withdraw because they considered it suspicious or politicised. The fear of transnational suppressions still affected their activities at the trade fair since no one was completely convinced that they would be fine after the meeting or that their participation in the gathering would not be reported back to the regime. “We were prohibited from gathering in Syria like this. We needed to apply for permission first to the government for the gathering, and then the

⁵¹¹ Personal observation, Adana, February 19, 2015.

⁵¹² Ibid.

⁵¹³ Ibid.

government might send another person from the public sector to supervise our meeting,” stated an Aleppan medicine industrialist no54.⁵¹⁴

Although participating in the trade fair still showed their fear and distrust of each other, in the minds of the Syrian businessmen, a trade fair was not merely a place for economic business; rather, it provided a place for old friends who had been separated to discuss their new investments and possibly establish an organisation for expatriate businessmen. More importantly, it was considered safer to gather and discuss other forms of ‘businesses,’ since that would avoid the attention of the omnipresent *mukhabarat*.

b. Communication applications (Apps) – a tool for bridging the long distance

You see this WhatsApp group? We have 40 Syrian businessmen in this group, and we are all working in the same field. We are all old friends from a long time ago. See, this guy sent me an Eid Mubarak during the Eid.

-An Aleppan plastic businessman no55⁵¹⁵

Expatriate Syrian businessmen were living in different cities and countries, as demonstrated above. To maintain their friendships and stay in touch with one another, the most common way was through mobile phones. Mobile phone software such as Viber and WhatsApp were the crucial means for expatriate Syrian businessmen in different places to keep in touch. Syrian businessmen also used these software’s ‘chat room’ functions to set up group chats for up to 40 Syrian businessmen living in

⁵¹⁴ Aleppan medicine industrialist no54, personal interview, Gaziantep, January 20, 2015.

⁵¹⁵ Aleppan plastic businessman no55, personal interview, 6th of October, October 2, 2015.

different countries. Usually, the members who were in these groups were from the same field or had the same objectives for improving their investments. These chat room groups not only maintained their connections such as by sending regards or congratulations for the special events, but they were also considered as a secret location for other information.

In addition to the social aspects of their messages, businessmen might send messages to the group for suggestions about their projects, such as making inquiries about a customer's reputation or finding cheaper raw materials, etc. Furthermore, they also used the chat room groups to arrange meetings of future gatherings. For example, there was one person from one of the trade fairs who was responsible for arranging the trade fairs. He set up a chat room where other businessmen who were willing to participate in the trade fair could talk to each other. This was for sorting out arrangements about the trade fair, but also to discuss establishing an overseas Syrian businessmen organisation which they were planning to exhibit.

This means of connection was in a bounded space, where no one but the members of the group could access its information. Since the information might be confidential, they did not want to attract attention from other businessmen who could become a threat to their business or the *mukhabarat* who might question them about the conversations. Thus, people who were allowed in these chat groups were considered highly trustworthy and were cautious about adding new members.

Both participating in trade fairs and using mobile phone groups were the two means to how Syrian businessmen sustained and reinforced their limited networking during

their expatriation. They show that even though some businessmen were seeking to expand networks, the same old suspicion and dread of the Syrian regime's monitoring and suppression continued to constrain their business network.

5.5 Host land factors: adaptation to local institutions and business culture

In Syria, we do not pay tax. Rather, we pay some money to the officials who can help us to waive the tax we need to pay. By doing so, we can lower the cost of tax.

- An Aleppan real estate investor no56⁵¹⁶

The migrant businessmen needed to adapt to the local environment in order to improve their business. As Harris argues, the reasons UK-based Polish entrepreneurs adapted new business strategies into their business activities in the UK were due to the growth of their businesses and the hostile environment where their businesses were located.⁵¹⁷ Doing businesses in a foreign country is not an easy thing; varying degrees of discrimination by host societies may occur.⁵¹⁸ In addition to their own issues and concerns with the homeland factors, the expatriate Syrian businessmen also faced other matters from the host countries which directly affected their business operations. That is, Syrian businessmen were required to adapt to the countries where they relocated. Although the expatriate Syrian businessmen were required to adapt some of their former ways of doing business to conform to the local culture in order to make new investment in the host countries easier, some of their specific ways of

⁵¹⁶ Aleppan real estate investor no56, personal interview, Istanbul, December 10, 2014.

⁵¹⁷ Harris, "Entrepreneurship Amongst Polish Migrants in the West Midlands," 285-326.

⁵¹⁸ Bram Wauters and Johan Lambrecht, "Barriers to Refugee Entrepreneurship in Belgium: Towards an Explanatory Model," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 34, no. 6 (2008): 910.

thinking and acting have remained the same after assessing the possible threats from the regime or if they could not engage in the local institutions.

On the one hand, Syrian businessmen were required to obey the local governmental institutions, even if the local institutional context was different from the one they were used to working in. On the other hand, the Syrian businessmen needed to engage and interact with the local societies, especially with local businessmen since their main professions were in investments. This adaptation indicates that Syrian businessmen have transformed some of the ways in which they dealt with the issues of tax payment and how they conducted their businesses.

In pre-revolution Syria, Syrian businessmen lived in an environment lacking the rule of law. In this context, the businessmen knew how to pay bribes or seek help from individuals who would ease business operations in the country. They could decrease the amount of tax they needed to pay or even be exempted from the tax payments through their privileged networks.⁵¹⁹ Nevertheless, after establishing their investments in the host countries, those privileged networks could not facilitate their work abroad. What the Syrian businessmen were facing were new local governments and institutions that they had no choice but to obey. Thus, they could either follow the local business regulations or find other solutions to cope. An Aleppo machine trading businessman no6 in Gaziantep explained his observations of fellow Syrian businessmen's situations,

⁵¹⁹ Borshchevskaya, "Sponsored Corruption," 45; Bassam Haddad, "The Formation and Development of Economic Networks in Syria: Implications for Economic and Fiscal Reforms, 1986–2000," in *Networks of Privilege in the Middle East: The Politics of Economic Reform Revisited*, ed. Steven Heydemann (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) 46–54.

Now we need to pay taxes and do all the requirements which the Turkish government asks us to do. Honestly, it was not easy because before we just paid money to officials who we knew and they would solve it for us. This is why some Syrian businessmen do not know how to run a business here in Turkey; they never ran a business according to the local regulations before, but rather exploited their personal ties with regime's officials.⁵²⁰

Nevertheless, some Syrian businessmen in Egypt who did not officially register their business investments applied the old tricks, which was to find the 'wasta' for their work. The word of 'wasta' indicates "a middleman or 'connection' between somebody who wants a job, a license or government service and somebody who is in a position to provide it."⁵²¹ Egypt ranked 88 out of 167 countries on the corruption perceptions index in 2015. Turkey and Jordan ranked 66 and 45 respectively.⁵²² Addition, a report from the Centre for International Private Enterprise indicates that 42% of small and medium-sized enterprises in Egypt needed to pay illegal payments or gifts to obtain licenses for their businesses, and 29% needed to do so for operating their businesses.⁵²³ This means that the likelihood of small and medium-sized businesses to pay bribes for doing businesses in Egypt is high, and thus, many Egypt-based Syrian businessmen also managed to find the right individuals to pay bribes in order to facilitate their business operations. Out of 38 Syrian businessmen interviewed in Egypt, a police state, there were still five Syrian businessmen who would tell a complete stranger that they had paid bribes to the local officials to make

⁵²⁰ Aleppan machines trading businessmen no6. Personal interview. Gaziantep. December 13, 2014.

⁵²¹ Mohamed A. Ramady, *The Political Economy of Wasta: Use and Abuse of Social Capital Networking* (Springer International Publishing: Cham, 2016) vii.

⁵²² Corruption Perceptions Index 2015, *Transparency International* (2015) accessed March 16, 2017, <https://www.transparency.org/cpi2015/>.

⁵²³ John D. Sullivan et al., *Business Environment for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SME) in Egypt and SMEs' Interaction with Government Agencies 2009 Survey on Corruption Final Report, Center for International Private Enterprise* (2009) 7, accessed March 16, 2017, <http://www.cipe.org/sites/default/files/publication-docs/2009%20Egypt%20SME%20Survey%20Report%20EN%20.pdf>.

their business activities easier, whether regularly paying the bribes or only on occasion. This may indicate that the actual practice of bribing officials might be higher and more widespread. “Well, it is just like Syria here, the police or security men come to your shops. And you know what you need to do. Just give them some of your products or money, and then they will not bother you,” stated the Damascene clothes businessman no11 in Cairo.⁵²⁴

In addition to the local institutions, different business practices of the local communities were another issue the Syrian businessmen needed to face. Since the local businessmen sometimes had their specific ways of doing business, and because the Syrian businessmen also had their own ways of doing businesses, the Syrian businessmen needed to adjust to the local business practices in order to continue in the host lands. As previously shown, the two most frequent ways of doing business in the host countries were the use of cheques, and the custom of a one-year product return in Egypt. The expatriate Syrian businessmen needed to adapt their former ways by getting accustomed to using cheques in Turkey, Egypt, and Jordan and the one-year product return in Egypt in order to simplify their business operations. The adaptation of expatriate Syrian businessmen regarding tax payment and business operations indicates that they changed some of their former customs due to the host countries’ institutions and local customs.

5.6 Conclusion

⁵²⁴ Damascene clothes businessman no11, personal interview, Cairo, October 07, 2015.

Syrian businessmen left Syria with their economic capital after the 2011 revolution. Thousands of Syrian businessmen and their billions of US dollars relocated to Turkey, Egypt, and Jordan, where they established thousands of Syrian companies. Even though they left Syria, homeland factors still played roles in their daily economic activities in the host countries, which maintained the networks among the expatriate businessmen in a fragmented way. The businessmen needed to adapt to the new environments and certain behaviours changed after interacting with local institutions and businessmen. Two examples are taxes and business operations. Nevertheless, some specific ways of thinking and acting remained the same after they relocated to the host countries. This indicates that the previous specific ways of thinking and acting migrated with the businessmen to the host countries and continued to affect their behaviours. This was due to their assessment of risk that the regime could impose on them so they needed to remain cautious. They could not engage with specific local institutions so they needed to rely on previous civil mechanisms to facilitate their work in the host countries. How the homeland affected the expatriate Syrian businessmen economic activities also conforms to the diaspora concept that the diasporans have a homeland orientation even though they are away from their home countries.

Furthermore, even though the legacy of the fragmented network among the expatriate Syrian businessmen still existed after their resettlement, they embarked on building new business networks since they lacked economic capital and hope to improve investment. This indicates that the business networks of Syrian businessmen were gradually expanding during this transformation. During the network expansions, the political opinions, economic interest, and social acquaintances were the three main

factors that determined whether a new business partnership could be established. To counter the suspicious atmospheres, participating in trade fairs and using mobile phones' communication applications strengthened their business networks and sustained social ties with other fellow country businessmen. After examining how the specific ways of thinking and acting accompanied the businessmen and how it affected them as well as examining the expansion of the fragmented Syrian business networks from their economic activities in the host countries, the philanthropic work and political participation of the expatriate Syrian businessmen in the host countries will be examined.

Chapter 6 Charitable and Political Mobilisation in Exile: Continuation and Emancipation

The emergence of the economic investments of expatriate Syrian businessmen in Turkey, Egypt, and Jordan not only demonstrates a physical emigration of the great amount of economic capital and businessmen out of Syria, but their emigration also indicates that their previous specific ways of thinking and acting continued to affect their later activities in the host countries. Nevertheless, due to the impediments they have faced in the host countries, the Syrian businessmen have managed to strengthen the fragmented business networks they used to have and further expand their networks with their fellow business countrymen. In order to provide a broader picture of the transformation of the Syrian business community, in addition to the examination of their economic investments, the continuing philanthropic works and political participation of the expatriate Syrian businessmen will be analysed.

Philanthropic works and political participation from migrant communities in host countries are not a new phenomenon. Many studies have discussed the positive contributions which created or can be created by diaspora groups' philanthropic activities towards their homeland development.⁵²⁵ The Syrian business community used to actively engage in philanthropic works in the pre-2011 era, such as hosting charities or raisings funds for needy people, as previously mentioned in chapter 2. At

⁵²⁵ Esther Lethlean, *Diaspora: The New Philanthropy? Working Paper CPNS 17*, Brisbane, Centre of Philanthropy and Nonprofit Studies, Queensland University of Technology (2003); Shawn Teresa Flanigan, "Charity as Resistance: Connections between Charity, Contentious Politics, and Terror," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 29, no. 7 (2006); Abdulkadir Osman Farah, *Diaspora Involvement in the Development of Somalia, Working Paper No. 13*, DIIPER Research Series, Aalborg University (2009); Gérard Tchouasi, "Altruistic Preferences as Motivation for Migrants in Diaspora to Remit to Home Communities," *Research in Applied Economics*, 2, no. 1 (2010).

the same time, these private donations were ‘welcomed’ by the Syrian regime since they could supply the insufficient institutions of the government, as long as these activities did not threaten the regime’s power.⁵²⁶ Since 2011, any charitable or political activity thought to be against the Bashar regime might lead to punishment from the regime, such as the confiscation of Syrian businessmen’s economic properties in Syria in the name of ‘founding terrorist groups’.⁵²⁷ Nevertheless, after resettlement, most Syrian businessmen continued to contribute to philanthropic activities. Different from previous studies on diaspora philanthropy, the expatriate Syrian businessmen not only gave help to their fellow countrymen who were still inside the war-torn Syria, but more importantly they also provided aid to those who had fled Syria.

Additionally, various previous studies have demonstrated the political participation of refugees, migrants and diasporas in the countries where they resettled, and these activities usually have a feature of homeland orientation, such as studies on the Kurds, the Tamils, the Philippines, the Palestinians, the Jews, and the Armenians.⁵²⁸ After the Syrian businessmen left and settled into the host countries, at least eighteen of them took important posts in anti-Assad political organisations and broad political

⁵²⁶ Elvira, “State/Charities Relation in Syria.”

⁵²⁷ “al-ḥajz ‘ala amwāl rajul al-a‘māl al-Sūrī Maḥmūd ‘Anzarūti bi-tuhmat tamwīl al-irḥāb,” [Seizure of Syrian businessman Maḥmūd ‘Anzarūti’s money in the charge of terrorism financing] *Aliqtisadi*, December 30, 2012, accessed March 16, 2017, <https://sy.aliqtisadi.com/38921-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%B2-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A3%D9%85%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%B1%D8%AC%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B9%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D9%85%D8%AD%D9%85-2/>.

⁵²⁸ Wahlbeck, *Kurdish Diasporas*; Fuglerud, *Life on the Outside*; Wayland, “Ethnonationalist Networks;” Tyner and Kuhlke, “Pan-National Identities;” Lesch, “Palestinians in Kuwait;” Gillespie, “Edward Sayre and Liesl Riddle;” Lindholm and Hammer, *The Palestinian Diaspora*; Cohen, “From Ethnonational Enclave to Diasporic Community;” Weingrod and Levy, “Social Thought and Commentary;” Pattie, “Longing and Belonging;” Manaseryan, *Diaspora: the Comparative Advantage for Armenia*.

coalitions outside of Syria. This was a new state of being for the Syrian business community. As shown previously, except for the few business figures that were comparatively active in the participation of political affairs, members of the Syrian business community were for the most part politically apathetic in Syria due to the authoritative regime in pre-revolution Syria since politics were considered a taboo for most Syrians inside the country. The studies on diasporans that engage in homeland politics mostly focus on the people who left their home countries decades ago. However, of those eighteen expatriate Syrian businessmen who have actively taken part in anti-Assad political campaign, twelve left Syria after 2011. This indicates a different understanding; that the diaspora political engagement is mostly conducted by the people who left long ago, but the people who left more recently may also devote themselves to homeland politics.

In order to analyse how philanthropic works and political participation of Syrian businessmen have been mobilised in their host countries, the motivations and patterns of expatriate philanthropic works will first be investigated. This will demonstrate that the expatriate Syrian businessmen continuously engaged in philanthropic activities due to the former culture of giving and the social pressure which was imposed on them by their fellow countrymen. Nevertheless, they not only focused on charitable works in their home country, but they also provided aid to their fellow countrymen who had relocated to the host countries. Second, the specific conditions which emerged after the 2011 revolution that politically divided Syrian businessmen will be analysed. Based on different political ideas, the Syrian businessmen will be divided into three groups: those who are against the revolution and pro-regime, those who are for revolution and against the regime, and those who are self-proclaimed neutral.

Third, the motivations and patterns of the political participations will be examined. This analysis will demonstrate that there were at least eighteen expatriate Syrian businessmen actively participating in anti-Assad political activities who played important roles. They participated mainly because of their long-term resentment and personal experiences of suppression by the regime and the reduced levels of fear of further political suppressions by the regime. This also suggests that the people who left more recently have the abilities or willingness to take part in political participation in line with that of their fellow countrymen who left a long time ago.

The continuation of the Syrian businessmen's philanthropic works in exiles was due to their customs of charity and the social pressures they felt by their fellow countrymen. Furthermore, the political divisions and participation of the expatriate Syrian businessmen denotes the political emancipation of the Syrian business community. The Syrian business community, which had been low-politicised prior to the 2011 revolution, was experiencing a certain growth of political emancipation due to their long-term resentment and personal experiences of suppression from the Assad regime. In addition, personal ties of migrants and diasporans have been suggested to be important social capital which they can rely on to facilitate their activities in the host countries.⁵²⁹ The examination of the philanthropic and political activities of expatriate Syrian businessmen demonstrates that their networks have moved from local-level in Syria to a transnational level to which Syrian businessmen from different countries devote themselves, with dynamic input from previously exiled Syrian businessmen who had departed Syria prior to 2011. Finally, even though most

⁵²⁹ Brubaker, "The 'Diaspora' Diaspora," 5-7; Cindy Horst, "Refugee Livelihoods," 10; Gorman and Kasbarian, "Introduction: Diasporas of the Modern Middle East," 9; Castles and Miller, *The Age of Migration* 22.

expatriate Syrian businessmen have devoted themselves to philanthropic works and some of them have actively taken part in anti-Assad political activities, the fragmented networking of the Syrian business community and the restraint from political issues were, to a certain extent, still significant. Thus, this will reaffirm the argument that the specific ways of thinking and acting migrated with the businessmen and continued to affect their activities.

6.1 The continuation of social help – motivations and patterns

Previous studies on diaspora philanthropy suggest that due to the diasporans' sense of connection to the homeland and their consideration that charitable actions were a responsibility for supporting their fellow countrymen who were in need, the diasporans provided financial aid and built up investments in their home countries to improve the social and economic wellbeing of their fellow countrymen who remained in their homelands.⁵³⁰ The participation of expatriate Syrian businessmen in charitable activities was common not only in the pre-revolution era but also after their resettlements into the host countries. Out of the 191 Syrian businessmen interviewed, rarely did any businessmen state that she/he did not give aid or help fellow countrymen. Rather, any differences between them were in the amount of aid and in what forms the aid was distributed.

Although it is not possible to calculate the exact numbers or amount of aid contributed

⁵³⁰ Kathleen Dunn, Diaspora Giving and the Future of Philanthropy, *The Philanthropic Initiative* (2004) 4, accessed March 07, 2017, <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.601.3219&rep=rep1&type=pdf>; Ajailiu Niumai, "Indian Diaspora Philanthropy: A Sociological Perspective," *Man In India*, 91, no. 1 (2011): 104; Benjamin A.T. Graham, "Diaspora-Owned Firms and Social Responsibility," *Review of International Political Economy* (2014): 432.

by the expatriate Syrian businessmen to their fellow countrymen, some cases of philanthropic activities of expatriate Syrian businessmen suggest that the amount of aid from the business community was enormous. For instance, the former president of the Aleppo Chamber of Industry who left Syria for Egypt in mid-2012 personally donated \$5 million to establish a Syrian orphanage for 300 Syrian orphans in Turkey.⁵³¹ Another example is Abdu al-Qadir Sankari, the founder of the Abdu al-Qadir Sankari foundation who was a UAE-based Syrian businessman and owns a fashion and hospitality company in Dubai (Paris Group), has provided different charitable activities in and outside of Syria, holding hundreds of development and relief projects including education, health, protection and hygiene, food, shelter and community development, as well as reconstruction projects.⁵³² Furthermore, Walid al-Zu'bi, who was originally from Daraa and based in the UAE since the mid 1980s and worked in real estate, alone has donated 3 million UAE dirham (\$800,000) to Syrian refugees.⁵³³ Finally, the Syrian Business Council based in Dubai, which was established at the beginning of 2012 by long-term exiled Dubai-based Syrian businessmen, also raised around \$6 million from its members to provide food to the Syrians in the country, especially for those who were living in the rebel held areas.⁵³⁴

⁵³¹ Aleppo dessert industrialist no15, personal interview, Gaziantep, January 02, 2015. And Personal observation.

⁵³² Paris Group, accessed March 16, 2017, <http://www.parisgroup.ae/pg/index.html>; ('Abd al-Qadir Sankari) mu'assasa ra'ida tas'a li-binā' al-insān fī al-dākhil al-Sūrī," [The leading ('Abd al-Qadir Sankari) institution to seek for building the humanity inside Syria] *All4Syria*, February 7, 2016, accessed March 16, 2017, <http://www.all4syria.info/Archive/291002>.

⁵³³ "al-sira al-dhātiyya li-wazīr al-baniyya al-taḥtiyya wa al-zirā' mu. Walid al-Zu'bi," [CV of the Minister of Infrastructure and Agriculture engineer Waliyd al-Zu'bi] *All4Syria*, November 12, 2013, accessed March 16, 2017, <http://www.all4syria.info/Archive/110771>.

⁵³⁴ "majlis rijāl a'māl li-da'm al-sha'b al-Sūrī," [Business Council supports Syrian people] *Newscenter*, March 9, 2013, accessed March 16, 2017, <http://www.newscenternews/ar/news/view/4552.html>; Syrians at Home and Abroad Try to Ease Humanitarian Crisis, *The Washington Post*, December 18, 2012, accessed March 16, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/syrians-at-home-and-abroad-try-to-ease-humanitarian-crisis-/2012/12/18/561a0d76-4939-11e2-ad54-580638ede391_story.html?utm_term=.393b7fb47fe0.

The philanthropic activities of the expatriate Syrian businessmen had at least two distinct features: the providers of the aid and the receivers of the aid. Firstly, the expatriate Syrian businessmen's philanthropic aid was not restricted only to their fellow countrymen who were still living within war-torn Syria, but it was also distributed to Syrians who had fled Syria and were settled in the host countries. Second, the aid providers were not limited to the Syrian business diasporans who had left Syria decades ago. In addition to the long-term exiled Syrian businessmen who had already established non-profit organisations to help their fellow countrymen in the pre-2011 era (such as Ayman Asfari and Wafic Saïd) the post-2011 expatriate Syrian businessmen also participated in philanthropic activities. Ayman Asfari was originally from Idlib and became the CEO of Petrofac (a petrol company) in the UK. He established the Asfari foundation in the UK in 2006 which aims to provide aid to Syrians based on three dimensions: youth empowerment, civil society, and relief.⁵³⁵ Wafic Saïd was from Damascus, but in the 1960s he went to the UK and Saudi Arabia and invested in the field of construction. He later became the middleman for the Al-Yamamah arms deal between the UK and Saudi Arabia. He also founded the Karim Rida Said Foundation (now the Said Foundation) in 1982, which aims to “improve the life chances of children and young people by providing them with opportunities to receive good education and care,” focusing on young people in Syria, Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan, and the UK.⁵³⁶ In this context, the networks of Syrian businessmen's philanthropic works have also become a platform for the old and new expatriate Syrian businessmen to work together for providing aid to their fellow countrymen, whether in Syria or in the host countries. The motivations of expatriate

⁵³⁵ Petrofac, accessed March 16, 2017, <http://www.forbes.com/profile/ayman-asfari/>; Asfari foundation, accessed March 16, 2017, <http://www.asfarifoundation.org.uk/who-we-are/>.

⁵³⁶ Saïd Foundation, accessed March 16, 2017, <http://www.saidfoundation.org/our-vision-and-values>.

Syrian businessmen to engage in philanthropic works and the different patterns of philanthropic activities conducted by those expatriate Syrian businessmen will be examined.

- a. Motivations of charitable behaviours: a culture of giving and the diaspora philanthropic

I am a Muslim, and I believe in Allah. It is my duty to help my brothers who are in desperate need of help.

- An Aleppan textile tycoon and former president of Aleppan Chamber of Industry⁵³⁷

The motivations for diasporans to contribute to philanthropic works in their homeland are, as Flanigan and Abel-Samad suggest, due to the homeland sentiments that the diasporans feel to be their responsibility.⁵³⁸ Moreover, diasporans who use to live in a culture where social needs were provided for by families, clans, or ethnic groups have transported this social norm into the diaspora and passed it on to the next generation.⁵³⁹

⁵³⁷ Syrian tycoon1 who used to be the leading figure in the one of the Syrian Chambers, personal interview, Gaziantep, December 12, 2014.

⁵³⁸ Shawn Teresa Flanigan and Mounah Abdel-Samad, "Syrian Diaspora Members as Transnational Civil Society Actors: Perspectives from a Network for Refugee Assistance," *Contention: The Multidisciplinary Journal of Social Protest*, 4, no. 1-2 (2016): 54; Pnina Werbner, "The Place which is Diaspora: Citizenship, Religion and Gender in the Making of Chaordic Transnationalis," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 28 (2002); Jennifer M. Brinkerhoff, "Diaspora Philanthropy in an At-Risk Society: The Case of Coptic Orphans in Egypt," *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 37, no. 3 (2008); Jennifer M. Brinkerhoff, "Creating an Enabling Environment for Diasporas' Participation in Homeland Development," *International Migration*, 50, no. 1 (2009).

⁵³⁹ Tchouasi, "Altruistic preferences as motivation," 2.

On the one hand, the motivations of the Syrian business diasporans who left Syria decades ago and were not affected by the recent conflict in Syria but who were still motivated to help their homeland and fellow countrymen, can be explained by homeland sentiment and a cultural of social needs. On the other hand, for the Syrian businessmen who left Syria after the year of 2011 and suffered the same physical damages of properties and loss of family members as their countrymen, the reasons for them to contribute to philanthropic aids after their resettlement into the host countries deserved a deeper discussion: since their economic wealth have been majorly affected by the on going Syrian conflict since 2011, this made a major difference between those who left after the year of 2011 and those who have been exiled since decades in terms of their social economic situations. Thus the Syrian businessmen who left Syria after the year of 2011 and their connections to the long-term exiled Syrian businessmen will be examined.

Prior to the 2011 revolution, the Syrian business community used to actively engage in different forms of charitable activities on different scales in Syria to help their fellow countrymen who were in need. This indicates that the Syrian businessmen used to have a social norm of philanthropic activity. The above quote by a businessman (who donated \$5 million in Turkey to establish an orphanage for 300 Syrian orphans) explains one of the main reasons that most Syrian businessmen participate in philanthropic works. In Islam, the “institution of charity amongst Muslims is one of the five basic tenets which adherents have to conform to.”⁵⁴⁰ As Muslims, Syrian businessmen believed that by doing good to others could lead them to a better afterlife and gain Allah’s blessings. As such, the religious factor was one of the main reasons

⁵⁴⁰ Sultan Khan, “The Nature and Extent of Philanthropy amongst the Rainbow South African Muslim Community,” *Man In India*, 91, no. 1 (2011): 169.

which drove them to donate their time and money to needy people. After the Syrian businessmen experienced great losses due to the conflict in Syria and relocated to host countries, the culture of giving accompanied them and can be broadly perceived in their expatriate philanthropic activities. However, the amount of financial support of the Syrian businessmen who left after 2011 has shrunk. “Before the conflict, we used to give money to the poor people in Syria, even the ones who we personally do not know. But now, we’ve lost a lot of our money because of the conflict, so we can only help the people who we know,” stated the Aleppan plastic raw material businessman no37.⁵⁴¹

Nevertheless, the altruistic mind-set which originated from the Islamic faith does not alone explain this culture of giving. Pierret argues that in the pre-2011 era, Syrian businessmen used philanthropic events as means to achieve or raise their social popularity, or even to instrumentalise it for reaching political goals.⁵⁴² Since those businessmen used to engage in charitable activities, they were also well known among non-businessmen Syrians. After experiencing damage from the conflict and relocating to host countries, the social reputations of giving turned into a certain extent of ‘social responsibility’. An Aleppan furniture industrialist no56 stated,

Even I experienced the same disaster as other Syrians, my economic conditions are still far better than most of theirs after we all resettled in Turkey. But at the same time, it means that I have more social responsibility than the others since I’m richer. Or the others consider that I have more responsibility. After I settled and established my business in Turkey, sometimes I do not like to respond to other [Syrians’] phone calls even if I knew them before because too many people call me just to ask for financial support. I would love to do so, but it’s becoming too much.

⁵⁴¹ Aleppan plastic raw material businessman no37, personal interview, Istanbul, December 8, 2014.

⁵⁴² Pierret, “Sunni Clergy Politics,” 77.

This not only happens to me but to many of my business friends. I just give the money to people I know, such as my relatives or really close friends. This is what I can do for now.⁵⁴³

Even though the businessman quoted here responded negatively to his fellow countrymen's calls for help, in the end he still provided financial aid to his relatives and close friends. This suggests that although Syrian businessmen may try to avoid the social responsibility that they felt, they still did give help to those who they had close relationships with.

Thus, the reasons that Syrian businessmen who left after 2011 contributed to philanthropic works in the host countries were that their culture of giving accompanied them, and that they felt a 'social responsibility' to their fellow countrymen. This led them to continuously work on philanthropic activities as before, even if their economic situations were not as strong. Nevertheless, the ways in which they conducted those charitable activities might or might not be the same as before.

b. Patterns of philanthropic works – individuals vs. groups

In June 2014, we established the Baraka Charity Institution in Mersin. In the beginning, it was just me and a few close business friends. Now we have around forty people working together for this charity, not all of them were businessmen.

- An Aleppan real estate investor no57⁵⁴⁴

⁵⁴³ Aleppan furniture industrialist no56, personal interview, Al-Obour, November 7, 2015.

⁵⁴⁴ Aleppan real estate investor no57, personal interview, Mersin, February 3, 2015.

Although it was argued that Syrian refugees in Irbid, Jordan who used to seek financial help from other expatriate Syrians as their livelihood no longer did so due to the prolongation of conflict, expatriate Syrian businessmen continued to devote themselves to charities and donate money to their fellow countrymen.⁵⁴⁵ The charity provided by the expatriate Syrian businessmen to their fellow countrymen came in various forms. It was not only providing relief goods, such as money, food, or medicine, but it also came in the form of scholarships, building schools and orphanages, or setting up religious courses. Syrian businessmen might either donate cash directly to the charities so that they could buy required goods for the poor, or they might donate things such as clothes or foods. These donations would be further distributed by the charities to the people who were in need, whether to Syrians who had relocated in host countries, or to Syrians who were still living in Syria, particularly those in the rebel held areas.⁵⁴⁶ Furthermore, expatriate Syrian businessmen primarily conducted philanthropic activities in two patterns: as individuals, or as groups. Although they continued to engage in philanthropic

⁵⁴⁵ Matthew R. Stevens, "The Collapse of Social Networks among Syrian Refugees in Urban Jordan," *Contemporary Levant*, 1, no. 1 (2016).

⁵⁴⁶ Distributing heaters to Syrians who lived in Antakya from the Freedom Floka, "fulūka al-ḥurriyya ll ḍimn ḥamlat tawzī' al-madāfi' 'alā ukhwata-nā al-Sūrīyīn fī madīnat Anṭākiyā al-Turkiyya," [Floka Freedom ll part of the distribution campaign of heaters to the Syrian brothers in the Turkish city of Antakya] *Youtube*, December 20, 2013, accessed March 17, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=71fp4egS8tI>; Distributing four lambs to the Syrians in the eastern Ghouta at the countryside of Damascus from the Freedom Floka, "jam'iyya fulūka al-ḥurriyya - mashrū' aḍāḥī al-'īd - al-Ghūṭa al-Sharqiyya," [Floka freedom association - Project of sacrificial festival – eastern al-Ghūṭa] *Youtube*, September 13, 2016, accessed March 17, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5upOdwaFHTg>; mashrū' fulūka al-ḥurriyya min al-dākhil al-Sūrī ilā dākhil Turkiyā," [Floka Freedom Project from inside Syria into Turkey] *Youtube*, August 25, 2016, accessed March 17, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SZFDZoAUGPA>; distributing cash for 202 families in the countryside of Darra – western Almaliha, from the Syrian Business Forum, "mu'awwināt māliyya muntadā rijāl al-a' māl - al-Maliḥa al-Gharbiyya," [Financial aid Business Forum - Western al-Maliḥa 2013-5-23] *Youtube*, May 23, 2013, accessed March 17, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dZifJ6L2iyg>; medicines and medical machines to the countryside of Homs, from the Syrian Business Council, biṭāqat shukr min idārat al-mashfā al-maydānī li-majlis rijāl al-a' māl al-Sūrī wa-l-maktab al-ṭibbī al-Sūrī al-muwahḥid," [Thanks from the field hospital of the Syrian Business Council and the United Syrian Medical Office] *Youtube*, May 23, 2013, accessed March 17, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UpKiDcLPjlk>.

activities, as they had pre-2011, for various reasons after they relocating, their charitable networks transnationalised to include expatriate Syrian businessmen from different countries.

Donating individually: a lack of capital and a lack of trust

Syrian businessmen who donate individually provided aid to their fellow countrymen in the host countries or in Syria without interacting with other Syrian businessmen. Usually, the amount of aid from this category was less than the amount from the latter, and most were the ones who left Syria after 2011. This was because the conflict in Syria lost them their capital and caused them to be suspicious of other Syrian businessmen's intentions. On the one hand, since the conflict damaged the businessmen's wealth, they sometimes attempted to avoid giving aid. This decrease in economic capital of Syrian businessmen also lowers their abilities to engage in charities as much as they had before the eruption of the 2011 revolution. On the other hand, the conflict divided the Syrians into different groups, whose stand with or against the Bashar regime, and those who stayed silent. When the businessmen provided aid, they would be suspicious of where the aid went. An Aleppo plastic raw material businessman no37 explained his personal donation experience,

I used to donate a lot before the conflict. I built schools; I gave goods to the poor. Even when the conflict started and people came to me to ask for help, I did what I could, as before. But there was one time I gave a man a great amount of money, and later I found out that he used the money I gave him to buy weapons. This was not my intention; I totally disagree with armed activities. Since then, I do not give money to groups or work with other people for charities; I prefer to do it by myself

and give the money to people I know. Because I do not know whether the money I donate will cause more bloodshed or not.⁵⁴⁷

This was not only clear for businessmen who were pro- and anti-regime, but also for the self-proclaimed neutral businessmen. They were also cautious to not give aid to any people who might be related to politics since their donations might get them into political trouble with the regime, as in the cases of businessmen whose properties were confiscated and who were considered to fund terrorist groups.

Cooperating with others: religion and regionalism

Although many Syrian businessmen preferred to conduct philanthropic works individually, others decided to work with their fellow business countrymen. Those who provided aid as a group either established charitable organisations or they conducted the philanthropic works without an official organisation. The amount of aid the Syrian businessmen provided as groups would usually be much higher than that of individuals.

As suggested by the NGOSyria website, there were 780 charitable organisations aimed at helping Syrians.⁵⁴⁸ Nevertheless, not all these organisations were related to or funded by Syrian businessmen. Those who participated or contributed to philanthropic works preferred to keep a low-profile and were not willing to comment

⁵⁴⁷ Aleppan plastic raw material businessman no37, personal interview, Istanbul, December 8, 2014.

⁵⁴⁸ The website is an electronic statistical database service for providing information of the non-governmental organisations for the Syrians, *NGOSyria*, accessed March 17, 2017, <http://ngosyria.org/>.

on their altruistic actions since, from a religious perspective, they believed that when a person does good, he should not brag or advertising the good deeds.⁵⁴⁹

Religion played an important role in the businessmen's charities. Two Turkey-based Syrian charities, which had been established and funded by two businessmen interviewed during fieldwork, exemplified this religious connection: the Baraka Charity Institution (mu'assasat al-baraka al-khayriyya) and the Freedom Floka (fulūka al-ḥurriyya), both in Mersin, Turkey.⁵⁵⁰ These organisations were funded by 10 and 15 expatriate Syrian businessmen respectively.

Firstly, the two charities both had businessmen who were members of the charities but at the same time were sheikhs or could be considered as person with rich Islamic knowledge in the Syrian community. For example, one of the members from the Baraka Charity Institution was the son of the prominent Aleppan sheikh in the 1970s, and one of the members of Freedom Floka was often consulted by other members of the charity about religious issues.⁵⁵¹ The founding member of the Freedom Floka even had 'zebibah' ink on his forehead, which is far less common in Syria even among pious people than in Egypt, and demonstrates his piety in the practices of religion. "The zebibah, Arabic for raisin, is a dark circle of callused skin, or in some cases a protruding bump, between the hairline and the eyebrows. It emerges on the

⁵⁴⁹ During my interviews, even I heard some informants were donating money or helping other needy Syrians, while I asked them about these activities, most of them refused to expose the amount of money they donated.

⁵⁵⁰ Baraka Charity Institution, accessed March 17, 2017, https://www.facebook.com/pg/barakacharity/about/?ref=page_internal; the word 'Floka' is a one of the terms of heritages of the Lattkians, see Freedom Floka, accessed March 17, 2017, https://www.facebook.com/pg/FreedomFloka/about/?ref=page_internal.

⁵⁵¹ Personal observation.

spot where worshipers press their foreheads into the ground during their daily prayers.”⁵⁵²

Secondly, both charities have spaces especially allocated for Islamic prayer. In addition to the material goods they distributed to the poor, they both provided religious courses such as memorising of the Quran, citing the Quran, and learning the al-Hadith and the Prophet’s biography.⁵⁵³ The religious perspective of the Syrian businessmen’s charities is consistent with religious motivation whereby religion not only motivated expatriate Syrian businessmen, but it also affected the establishment and operation of charities.

Furthermore, as previously mentioned, regionalism affected the ways in which Syrian businessmen used to interact with each other prior to 2011. Regionalism could also be perceived through businessmen’s charitable activities after their expatriations. When Syrian businessmen decided to embark on philanthropic activities in a group, not only did businessmen from the same cities in Syria work together in groups, but in some cases they might also avoid or not seek help from businessmen who come from a different city in Syria. All the founding members of the two charities mentioned above were Aleppo businessmen. One charity which was founded by a long-term exiled Damascene businessman in Jordan would not welcome, or would even refuse,

⁵⁵² Michael Slackman, Fashion and Faith Meet, on Foreheads of the Pious, *The New York Times*, December 18, 2007, accessed March 17, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/18/world/africa/18egypt.html>.

⁵⁵³ This indicates that the Freedom Floka provided children courses including the remembrance and citation of the Quran, the explanation of the Prophet autobiography, “jam’iya fuluka al-ḥuriya (minhaj al-tifl al-suri al-ḥur),” [Floka Freedom Association (free Syrian children approach)], Youtube, June 29, 2015, accessed March 17, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0o1hMbGqNVY>; From the Facebook page of the Baraka Charity Institution has many posts regarding the religious courses or speech given by different shiekhs in the institution, accessed March 17, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/barakacharity/?fref=ts>.

newly arrived non-Damascene Syrian businessmen.⁵⁵⁴ The orphanage which was funded by the former president of the Aleppan Chamber of Industry had another four Syrian businessmen helping with the project, and they were all from Aleppo.⁵⁵⁵ All of the executive board members of The Homs League Abroad, were originally from Homs.⁵⁵⁶ These cases indicate that once Syrian businessmen decided to cooperate in philanthropic activities, regionalism would play an important role. The persistence of regionalism illustrates the argument that the specific ways of thinking and acting migrated with the businessmen and continued to affect them. Despite being away from their home countries, previous features of networking continued to affect the ways in which they interacted with each other.

As such, the formation and operation of these two charities demonstrate that religion was a main factor which contributed to the businessmen's cooperation of philanthropic work, and that regionalism was a factor that shaped the way expatriate Syrian businessmen's philanthropic activities were run.

In addition to the motivations and patterns of the expatriate Syrian businessmen's charitable activities, the philanthropic networks of expatriate Syrian businessmen have risen from a local level to a regional or even transnational level. As the quote above shows, the Saudi-based Homs industrialist has cooperated with Turkey-based Homs Syrian businessmen for charitable activities. This was also observed during fieldwork with businessmen from Daraa, Latakia, Damascus, and Aleppo. It demonstrates that Syrian businessmen who were from the same Syrian city prior to

⁵⁵⁴ Aleppan food industrialist no31, personal interview, Amman, August 2, 2015.

⁵⁵⁵ Personal observation, December 12, 2014.

⁵⁵⁶ Homs League Abroad, accessed March 17, 2017, <http://www.homsleague.org/>.

leaving Syria at different timings and being based in different countries after relocation, worked together for philanthropic activities after the 2011 revolution. Other cases include the former president of the Aleppo Chamber of Industry, who cooperated with the Turkey-based Aleppo businessmen on the orphanage. Although the charitable networks of expatriate Syrian businessmen have become transnationalised, regionalism under the context of homeland conflict has crossed national boundaries, whereby expatriate Syrian businessmen in different host countries who are from the same Syrian cities work together for the sake of philanthropic activities.

6.2 The origins and features of political categorisation of expatriate Syrian businessmen

Homeland politics may divide citizens who have left the homeland into different political groups.⁵⁵⁷ After the eruption of the 2011 revolution, the Syrian business community has also divided politically. Most Syrian businessmen intentionally tried to stay away from politically related affairs in the pre-revolution era and used to spend most of their efforts on business investments. Nevertheless, since the eruption of the revolution, some businessmen have actively taken part in anti-regime activities in Syria, as previously demonstrated. Following their resettlements to the host countries, those Syrian businessmen continued to actively take part in anti-regime political activities. Although most preferred to stay away from any political issues as before, and they were not willing to talk about current events in their country and were aware

⁵⁵⁷ Camilla Orjuela, "Divides and Dialogue in the Diaspora during Sri Lanka's Civil War," *South Asian Diaspora*, 9, no. 1 (2017).

of who was around them at all times. Most businessmen would not use the word ‘revolution’ to describe the 2011 uprising in Syria, but rather, they would use more neutral words such as ‘incident’ (ḥāditha) or ‘disaster’ (ma’sā). This disassociation with politics did not mean that the expatriate Syrian businessmen agreed with the regime; it came out of fear of further political suppression. Nevertheless, the emergence of 18 anti-regime Syrian businessmen who actively took part in anti-Assad political organisations indicates a political breakthrough for the long-term, low-politicised Syrian business community. I will explain and give the backgrounds of these 18 politicised Syrian businessmen in the next section.

The specific conditions which contributed to the political mobilisation of expatriate Syrian businessmen will be analysed by examining the origins and features of their different political beliefs after resettlement in the host countries. The political division was developed under a combination of opportunities, threats, attitudes of host countries, the influences from the home government, and the features of these different expatriate communities.

Expatriate Syrian businessmen can be categorised into three groups based on their different political beliefs towards the 2011 Syrian uprising as shown in the previous chapter: the pro-regime businessmen, the anti-regime businessmen, and the self-proclaimed neutral businessmen. Although there were some expatriate Syrian businessmen in Turkey who had completely given up their former business activities and worked exclusively on political activities, and although more than half of the interviewees demonstrated their anti-regime political beliefs, most stayed politically low-profiled, while others maintained their loyalty to the Bashar regime. Since the

fear of political suppressions from the regime continued to deter most Syrian businessmen, especially the self-proclaimed neutral businessmen, from taking part in political activities, only political mobilisations of the pro- and anti-regime expatriate Syrian businessmen will be analysed.

Lennders and Heydemann argue that opportunities and threats were significant, but not sufficient, factors for explaining popular mobilisation in Syria in the first few months of 2011. The opportunity and threat needed to first “be contextualized within the specific social and political environment..., in order to appreciate their local significance.”⁵⁵⁸ Host countries and home countries also affect the mobilisation of migrants in host countries, as Østergaard-Nielsen contends in the case of Kurds and Turks in Germany, stating that “an integral part of their [migrants’] agency is the perception and reaction of political actors, in both the countries of settlement and origin, to their activities.”⁵⁵⁹ Furthermore, the mobilisation of migrant groups in host lands are also influenced by the characteristics of the migrant groups themselves.⁵⁶⁰ As such, to analyse the political mobilisation of the expatriate Syrian businessmen, not only do their opportunity structures and threats need to be differentiated and contextualised, but the impact from the host countries, the influences on their mobilisations from the home country, and their own characteristics also need to be taken into considerations.

a. Pro-regime businessmen

⁵⁵⁸ Leenders and Heydemann, “Popular Mobilization in Syria,” 139.

⁵⁵⁹ Eva Østergaard-Nielsen, *Transnational Politics: Turks and Kurds in Germany* (London: Routledge, 2003) 2.

⁵⁶⁰ Lea Müller-Funk, “Diaspora Mobilizations in the Egyptian (Post)Revolutionary Process: Comparing Transnational Political Participation in Paris and Vienna,” *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies* 14, no. 3 (2016): 367-68.

We can see that the problem in Syria is all from abroad. There was no revolution. Rather it was the Western powers instigating the people [Syrians] to conduct these activities. The world mainstream news is incorrect; it is our regime fighting against the terrorist.

- A Damascene household goods industrialist no29⁵⁶¹

The pro-regime Syrian businessmen were opposed to the 2011 revolution and supported the Bashar regime. They believed that the Bashar regime was innocent and that it was being falsely incriminated by foreign powers, namely the United States, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey. The above quote from a Damascene household items industrialist is an example of what this political group would state during interviews regarding the current situation inside Syria. They generally did not consider the event inside Syria to be a revolution, but rather they saw it as a rebel movement which was instigated by political powers out from Syria.

The reason they leaned toward the Bashar regime's side was because of their former politico economic roots: they were the crony businessmen whose wealth mainly came from their nepotistic network with the Syrian regime figures. Furthermore, some continued to do business with Syria or have their familial business partners and relatives run or take care of their business in Syria. This was especially true where business investments were restricted, such as in the regime held areas. The regime further attempted to boost or encourage the Syrian businessmen by announcing

⁵⁶¹ Damascene household goods industrialist no29, personal interview, Amman, July 23, 2015.

millions of US dollars new investment projects in Lattakia or Tartus in 2015.⁵⁶²

“Even though I left Syria at the end of 2012, my brother stayed in Syria to operate our family textile factory in Homs. Then he later moved the factory from Homs to Lattakia,” stated the Egypt-based Aleppan textile industrialist no22 who was on the 100 prominent businessmen list in 2009.⁵⁶³

Those businessmen’s fortunes were protected and built on personal relationships with the Bashar regime and the reason why they left the country was not due to the regime’s suppressions. Since the threats to the pro-regime businessmen were not from the Bashar regime itself and the opportunity they encountered was a possibility to lose their long-term patronage network if the revolutionists succeeded, there would be no reason to give up their loyalties to the regime, but rather their loyalties would remain with their former patrons. In addition, their properties and relatives who were still working and living in Syria required the regime’s protection and support.

Nevertheless, the number of businessmen from this group was small compared with the other two political groups of businessmen outside of Syria because there was no significant departure of ruling family businessmen. Additionally, the number of crony businessmen in the pre-revolution era was not large in the country prior to the year of 2011.

The attitudes of the host governments towards the Syrian uprising also affected the appearances of the Syrian businessmen’s political beliefs. Due to the general

⁵⁶² wizāra al-siyāḥa taṭraḥ mashārī‘ li-l-istithmār fī al-sāḥil wa Dimashq,” [Ministry of Tourism launches projects for investment in the coast and Damascus] *aliqtisadi*, August 16, 2015, accessed March 17, 2017, <https://sy.aliqtisadi.com/668230-مشاريع-جديدة-للاستثمار-الساحي->.

⁵⁶³ Aleppan textile industrialist no22, personal interview, Cairo, November 17, 2015.

anti-Assad political atmosphere in Turkey, Turkey was a less attractive destination to settle in for pro-Bashar businessmen. The Damascene clothes industrialist no21 commented, “Even though they are with Bashar, they are too afraid to show their real opinions. Why? Because the environment here is all against Bashar!”⁵⁶⁴ Only 3 out of the 129 Syrian businessmen interviewed in Turkey expressed pro-regime opinions. Even so, these three businessmen did not directly praise the regime but rather they chose to ignore and not comment on the suppressions imposed by the regime, or they would blame all the casualties in Syria on the rebels. “Yes, the regime is bad, so curse them one time. But the rebels are worse, so curse them twice!” said the Aleppan shoes industrialist no58.⁵⁶⁵ In Jordan, only 1 out of the 19 Syrian businessmen interviewed could be categorised as pro-regime. In Egypt, since the Egyptian government was a strong supporter of the Bashar regime after the 2013 coup, the number of pro-Bashar regime business figures was higher than in Turkey and Jordan; 9 out of the 38 businessmen interviewed were pro-regime.

One interesting point here is that even if those businessmen claimed that they were supporters of the Bashar regime, there were no pro-regime political activities run by Syrian businessmen who left Syria after 2011. This might be explained by the sanctions that were imposed by the Western countries on the Bashar regime, which also decreased the political mobilisations of the pro-regime businessmen in undertaking further political activities in support of the Bashar regime while in exile.

The only expatriate Syrian businessman who was involved in political related activities was the president of the Egyptian Syrian Business Council, Khaldūn

⁵⁶⁴ Damascene clothes industrialist no21, personal interview, Istanbul, March 13, 2015.

⁵⁶⁵ Aleppan shoes industrialist no58, personal interview, Gaziantep, December 28, 2014.

al-Muwaqq‘. He has resided in Egypt for twenties years and did not publicly speak of the Syrian political events prior to the 2013 coup. In 2014, he did, however, organise a business envoy of Egypt-based Syrian businessmen to visit Syria and discuss economic investment plans with the Syrian Commerce Minister.⁵⁶⁶ This indicates a political significance and pragmatic approach of pro-regime businessmen who participated in business delegations with Assad Syria because they could finally show their support of the Assad regime after the political environment in the host country had firmly declared a political stance with the regime.

b. Anti-regime businessmen

Even before the 2011 revolution, Syrians wanted to have the revolution, but were waiting for the right time because the people could not bear this unjust [al-Assad] regime.

- An Aleppan food industrialist no42⁵⁶⁷

The anti-regime businessmen were those who publicly accused the Bashar regime of its injustice ruling and demanded a political change in Syria. This group did not hesitate to openly show their political beliefs or to criticise the regime’s behaviour. For example, there was a three-starred flag which represented the Syrian revolution, and some of the anti-regime businessmen kept it displayed on their desks inside their offices.⁵⁶⁸

⁵⁶⁶ “wazīr al-tijāra yaltaqī wafd.”

⁵⁶⁷ Aleppan food industrialist no42, personal interview, Adana, April 15, 2015.

⁵⁶⁸ Observations.

Businessmen left the country due to the escalation of the conflict and worsening situations of security, economics, and politics. Among those who fled were some businessmen who had actively been participating in revolutionary events, as previously demonstrated. This presented the opportunity of overthrowing the long-term patronage and authority of the Assad regime. Nevertheless, this ‘opportunity’ alone was not enough to encourage businessmen to partake in anti-regime political activities at the cost of losing their life or personal properties. The uncertainty of the aftermath for participating in political events shattered the businessmen’s faith. Along with this ‘opportunity,’ in the context of state-business relationships in pre-revolution Syria and the emigration background, different incidents of ‘threats’ by the Assad regime to some of its members from the Syrian business community or their relatives, whether economic or political, used to occur frequently, but after the revolution have been occurring with a greater frequency.

Since the Syrian people began the revolution, the suppressions from the regime’s military forces have never stopped. The series of threats to the members of the business community and to their relatives, as well as witnessing brutal killings by the regime have fuelled some businessmen into undertaking political activities for achieving what they considered to be justice for their country. After the businessmen emigrated, the opportunity and threat accompanied them. Nevertheless, once the Syrian businessmen moved, the social political environment in which they resettled directly determined whether they could continue their political activities or not.

As previously shown, the governments of Turkey, Egypt, and Jordan held different political attitudes towards the Syrian conflict. Turkey continued to demonstrate its

support for the end on the Assad regime from the end of 2011 until the end of 2016; Egypt switched its political support of opposing the Assad regime after the coup by Abdel Fattah al-Sisi in mid 2013; and Jordan persisted in being cautious or ‘vague’ about the Syrian uprising.

The different political attitudes of the host governments not only affected the emigration of the Syrian businessmen, but also further determined to what extent the political mobilisation of the expatriate Syrian businessmen could put into practice. The diversified social political environments in the host countries led to different outcomes of political mobilisation. On the one hand, if the host governments’ political position towards the Assad regime was negative, there would be a greater chance that the businessmen who were planning anti-regime political activities would be mobilised. For instance, in Turkey, the anti-Assad environment allowed Syrian businessmen to organise anti-Assad oriented political activities in the country. Most anti-Assad political activities by the Syrian businessmen were mobilised and took into practices inside Turkey. Turkey-based Syrian businessmen participated in various anti-Assad regime business organisations, or broad political coalitions, or political party and organisation. The same situation occurred in Egypt during Mohammed Morsi’s presidency between mid 2012 and mid 2013 since he was opposed to the regime. For example, Egypt-based Syrian businessman participated in the operation of the Coordinating Committee of the Syrian Revolution in Egypt between 2011 and 2013.⁵⁶⁹

⁵⁶⁹ “Nizār Kharāṭ li-niyūz santar: al-inqilābīyīn fī Miṣr ḥārabū al-thawra al-Sūriyya Wa-qaṭa‘ū ‘an-ha al-da‘m,” [Nizār Kharāṭ to News Center: the coup in Egypt fought the Syrian revolution and cut off its support] *Newscenter*, December 14, 2015, accessed March 17, 2017, <http://www.newscenter news/ar/news/view/15048.html>.

On the other hand, when the local social political environment was either pro-regime or vague, no anti-Assad political activities could be developed. As for the period of Sisi's rule in Egypt, since his political support favoured the Bashar regime, it was not possible for the anti-Assad Syrian businessmen to partake in anti-regime political activities. As a result, few anti-Syrian regime activities developed in Egypt after Sisi's reign. In Jordan, when the local authority did not have a clear political response to the Syrian conflict, no distinct political activities from the Jordan-based Syrian businessmen were reported.

Thus, the conditions for Syrian businessmen to mobilise in political activities not only required having the opportunity or threat, but the importance of the host countries' political stances was another crucial factor for the emergence of political mobilisation. Nevertheless, the homeland and the characteristics of the migrant groups also need to be taken into account to analyse the mobilisation of migrants.

6.3 From business to politics – reasons and patterns of political participations of expatriate Syrian businessmen

Out of the three groups of expatriate Syrian businessmen based on political ideas, the pro-regime and self-proclaimed neutral businessmen rarely took part in any form of political activity during their exile. Even though more than half of the interviewed expatriate Syrian businessmen were anti-regime (110 out of 191) the actual number who took part in political activities was not so great.

There were at least 18 expatriate Syrian businessmen who had personally taken part in political activities and whose political participations could be seen in the broad anti-Assad political coalitions: the Syrian National Council, the Syrian National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces, and the Syrian Interim Government; the two business organisations which were established by expatriate Syrian businessmen: the Syrian Business Forum, and the Syrian Economic Forum; the Muslim Brotherhood political party: the Justice and Constitution National Party (Al-Waad); and the other two non-governmental organisations: the Tayyār al-Wa‘d al-Sūrī, and the Coordination of the Syrian Revolution in Egypt.

And their political participations have been involved in forms of leading opposition-oriented political parties or organisations, having active positions in opposition-oriented political parties or organisations, or financially sponsoring these political organisations.⁵⁷⁰ In addition to these 18 politicised Syrian businessmen, the political participation of Gazwan Masri, who was originally from Aleppo but moved to Turkey in the 1980s has become a successful businessman with strong personal links to the Turkish authority and the Independent Industrialists’ and Businessmen’s Association (MÜSİAD) will be discussed at the end of the subsection a in this section.⁵⁷¹

The results for expatriate Syrian businessmen to participate in anti-Assad regime political activities were not only that their personal or relatives’ safeties could be faced with the threats from the Syrian regime’s political suppressions, as I have

⁵⁷⁰ I have interviewed with 13 out of the 18 Syrian businessmen who partook in political activities.

⁵⁷¹ Musiad, accessed March 17 2017, <http://www.musiad.org.tr/en>.

shown in the previous chapter about the case of the intelligence visit of the parents of an expatriate Aleppo businessman who criticised the regime's on his Facebook page;⁵⁷² but also, the Syrian businessmen who joined or publicly showed sympathy towards the rebels, their economic investments or properties inside Syria would be confiscated by the regime forces in the name of sponsoring the 'terrorist groups,' as mentioned previously.⁵⁷³

Since it was difficult and risky for businessmen to partake in anti-regime political activities, only the Syrian businessmen with a strong, long-standing resentment of the Assad regime who were less concerned with their safety or property could take part. The 18 politicised Syrian businessmen have at least two social contexts in common: they all experienced different degrees of persecutions from the Assad regime, and they did not have significant economic property or close relatives in Syria because they had left Syria decades before or they did not have close family members in Syria after the eruption of 2011.

a. The political organisations and politicised Syrian businessmen

Syrian National Council (SNC)

⁵⁷² See page 235.

⁵⁷³ See page 249.

The SNC was the first representative organisation for the Syrian oppositions in exile, formed on 2 October 2011 in Istanbul, Turkey.⁵⁷⁴ Its aims were to overthrow the Bashar regime, to affirm the national unity of Syria, to safeguard the non-violent Syrian revolution, and to protect the national independence and sovereignty against a foreign military intervention in Syria.⁵⁷⁵ 3 out of the 18 Syrian businessmen were founding members of SNC: Maḥmūd ‘Uthmān, Yāsīn al-Najjār, and Muṣṭafā Ṣabbāgh. Another two Syrian businessmen Ezzat Baghdadi and a Latakia foods and clothes businessman also eventually became members of the Council.

Maḥmūd ‘Uthmān was from Aleppo, but left Syria in 1983, completed his studies in Turkey and later became a businessman in international general trading.⁵⁷⁶

Yāsīn al-Najjār was from Aleppo, worked as an engineer and has business in the textile industry. He was the son of Ghassān al-Najjār. Ghassān was a member of the General Secretariat of the Damascus Declaration and was arrested by the Bashar regime in 2007.⁵⁷⁷ The Damascus Declaration “Is a secular umbrella opposition coalition named after a statement drafted in 2005 by numerous opposition groups and individuals demanding a multiparty democracy in Syria. It calls for a gradual and

⁵⁷⁴ Yezid Sayigh, The Syrian Opposition’s Leadership Problem, *Carnegie Middle East Center*, April 3, 2013, accessed March 17, 2017, <http://carnegie-mec.org/2013/04/03/syrian-opposition-s-leadership-problem-pub-51373>; “mu‘āraḍa Sūriyya tushakkil majlisan waṭaniyyan,” [Syrian opposition form a national council] *Al-Jazeera*, October 2, 2011, accessed March 17, 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.net/news/arabic/2011/10/2/%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B6%D8%A9-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D8%AA%D8%B4%D9%83%D9%84-%D9%85%D8%AC%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%A7-%D9%88%D8%B7%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A7>.

⁵⁷⁵ Syrian National Council, accessed March 17, 2017, <http://syriancouncil.org/en/about.html>.

⁵⁷⁶ Aleppan general trade businessman no59, personal interview, Istanbul, March 10, 2015.

⁵⁷⁷ “ḥukūma al-mu‘āriḍa al-Sūriyya .. mas’ūliyyāt taqārub al-mustaḥilāt fī ḥill fawḍā al-silāh wa al-māl,” [Syrian opposition government .. responsibilities convergence impossible in light of the chaos of arms and money] *Alarab*, November 19, 2013, accessed March 17, 2017, <http://alarab.co.uk/?id=8697>; “malaff mu‘taqālī i‘lān Dimashq li-l-taghyīr al-waṭanī al-dimuqrāṭī,” [File of the detainees of the Damascus Declaration for Democratic National Change] *The Syrian Human Rights Committee*, January 27, 2009, accessed March 17, 2017, <http://www.shrc.org/?p=9364>.

peaceful transition to democracy and the equality of all citizens in a secular and sovereign Syria.”⁵⁷⁸ Yāsīn stated that due to his family’s active political record, the government investigated them before the eruption of the revolution and put his name on a wanted list. As such, he left Syria for Qatar on 4 February 2011 as he had family members there⁵⁷⁹.

Muṣṭafā Ṣabbāgh was from Lattakia and left Syria for the Gulf due to security detention and prosecution by the Hafiz al-Assad regime. He then became a businessman and invested in industry and trade between Europe and the Gulf.⁵⁸⁰ He also took important leading roles in the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces as secretary-general and the Syrian Business Forum as president. He was thought to use his post for serving the interests of the Qatari authorities.⁵⁸¹

Ezzat Baghdadi was from Damascus and used to work in the wholesale of office equipment, furniture and university housing equipment.⁵⁸² When the war started, the regime sent him to mediate with the rebels in Daraa. He and his friends recommended the government apply multi-party system, but the regime believed him to be allied with the rebels. He was prisoned twice after this incident.⁵⁸³

⁵⁷⁸ The Damascus Declaration, *Carnegie Middle East Center*, March 1, 2012, accessed March 17, 2017, <http://carnegie-mec.org/publications/?fa=48514>.

⁵⁷⁹ Aleppo textile industrialist no59, personal interview, Gaziantep, January 7, 2015.

⁵⁸⁰ Syrian Businessman Mustafa Sabbagh, *Arabisk*, January 13, 2016, accessed March 17, 2017, <http://www.arabisklondon.com/syrian-businessman-mustafa-sabbagh/>.

⁵⁸¹ Roula Khalaf and Abigail Fielding-Smith, How Qatar Seized Control of the Syrian Revolution, *Financial Times*, May 17, 2013, accessed March 17, 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/f2d9bbc8-bdbc-11e2-890a-00144feab7de>; Phillips, *The Battle for Syria: International Rivalry in the New Middle East*, 116; Raphaël Lefèvre, Saudi Arabia and the Syrian Brotherhood, *Middle East Institute*, September 27, 2013, accessed March 17, 2017, <http://www.mei.edu/content/saudi-arabia-and-syrian-brotherhood>.

⁵⁸² Ezzat Baghdadi, *Nahda Group*, accessed March 17, 2017, <http://www.ngspm.com/1/2637/body/content/0/Ezzat-Baghdadi/#.WLqVEzuGM2w>.

⁵⁸³ Damascene general trade businessman no30, personal interview, Istanbul, May 18, 2014.

Finally, the Lattakia foods and clothes businessman stated that he participated in the revolution in Lattakia at the beginning, but afterwards he was imprisoned for two days in mid 2012. He left Syria for Saudi Arabia and later resettled in Turkey.⁵⁸⁴

Syrian National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces (SOC)

In November 2012, the Syrian oppositions agreed to form a more inclusive organisation to include various minority groups and other groups operating inside Syria under pressure from the U.S. and other countries.⁵⁸⁵ The blueprint of the framework of the SOC was outlined by Riyāḍ Sayf, who was a veteran dissident and a businessman. The SOC was later widely recognised by most countries.⁵⁸⁶

3 of the 18 politicised businessmen have taken part in the SOC: Riyāḍ Sayf was elected vice-president; Muṣṭafā Ṣabbāgh was elected secretary-general but withdrew in January 2014 due to the differing political opinions; and Yāsir Dhākīrī was the representative of the SOC in Gaziantep.⁵⁸⁷

⁵⁸⁴ Lattakia food trading and clothes industrialist no2, personal interview, Mersin, February 11, 2015.

⁵⁸⁵ A Backgrounder on the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, *Carnegie Middle East Center*, January 13, 2013, accessed April 14, 2017, <http://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/50628?lang=en>.

⁵⁸⁶ Guide to the Syrian opposition, *BBC*, October 17, 2013, accessed March 17, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-15798218>.

⁵⁸⁷ National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, *Carnegie Middle East Center*, January 11, 2013, accessed March 17, 2017, <http://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/50628?lang=en>; “liqā’ ma’ ra’is mumaththiliyyat al-i’tilāf fī Antāb,” [A meeting with the head of the Representative of the Coalition in Gaziantep] *Hama Council*, May 7, 2014, accessed March 17, 2017, <http://hamacouncil.org/?p=737>; Mustafa al-Sabbagh, Former SNC leader Explains Decision to Withdraw from Coalition, trans. Joelle El-Khourym, *Al-Monitor*, January 17, 2014, accessed March 17, 2017, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/politics/2014/01/syria-national-coalition-leader-decision-withdraw-geneva.html>.

Riyāḍ Sayf was from Damascus. He was a prominent businessman and worked in the garment industry, but was also a parliamentarian who actively campaigned against the Assad regime for two decades. He was also a major figure in the Damascus Declaration. As previously mentioned, he spent most of the 2000s in jail due to his outspoken political activities in Syria.⁵⁸⁸

Yāsir Dhākīrī belonged to an old family in Aleppo that used to work in the fields of flour and cement. His family was also well known in the Aleppan business community in the field of flour industry.⁵⁸⁹ He left Syria in mid 2012 because he became wanted by the Bashar regime due his participation in the revolution for distributing foods to the needy.⁵⁹⁰

Syrian Interim Government (SIG)

During the Syrian oppositions meeting which formed the SOC in Doha, Qatar in November 2012, the Syrian oppositions also agreed to establish the SIG once the SOC was recognised internationally.⁵⁹¹ On 18 March 2013, the SOC elected the first prime minister of the SIG.⁵⁹² Their aim was to “ensure the continuation of public services,

⁵⁸⁸ Riad Seif, *Carnegie Middle East Center*, November 14, 2012, accessed March 17, 2017, <http://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/50018?lang=en>.

⁵⁸⁹ Interviews and stated by other Aleppan businessmen.

⁵⁹⁰ Aleppan food industrialist no42, personal interview, Adana, April 15, 2015.

⁵⁹¹ “ittifāq al-Dūḥa ḥawl natā’ij ijtīmā’ al-mu’āraḍa al-Sūriyya,” [Doha agreement on the outcome of the Syrian opposition meeting] *National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces*, December 12, 2012, accessed March 17, 2017, <http://www.etilaf.org/%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1/news/agreement.html>.

⁵⁹² Anne Barnard, Syrian Rebels Pick U.S. Citizen to Lead Interim Government, *The New York Times*, March 18, 2013, accessed March 17, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/19/world/middleeast/syria-warplanes-hit-lebanon-for-first-time.html>.

legal duties, and basic services in liberated territories” as suggested by the SOS.⁵⁹³

Walīd al-Zu‘bi and Yāsīn al-Najjār were working as ministers in the Ministry of Infrastructure and Agriculture and Water Resources and the Ministry of Communications and Transport and Industry of SIG respectively. Another Aleppan machine and textile businessman was a consultant in the Ministry of Communications and Transport and Industry.

Walīd al-Zu‘bi was originally from Daraa but moved to the UAE and established the Tiger Group in the mid 1980s for real estate and construction. He conducted various philanthropic works among his careers.⁵⁹⁴ He was a member of the SNC and also participated in the election of the prime minister of the SOG in March 2013.⁵⁹⁵

The Aleppan machines and textile businessman left Syria for Egypt at the beginning of 2012 due to the escalation of conflict, and moved to Turkey in October 2013. At the beginning of 2015, he took the post of consultant in the SIG.⁵⁹⁶

Justice and constitution national party (Waad)

The Waad party was established on 30 June 2013. The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood “hoped [that the Waad] would be part of a democratic transition in Syria.”⁵⁹⁷ The

⁵⁹³ National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces, accessed March 17, 2017, <http://en.etilaf.org/about-us.html>.

⁵⁹⁴ “majmū‘at tāyjar,” [Tiger Group] *Tiger Group*, accessed March 17, 2017, <http://tigergroup.net/ar/pages/About.aspx>.

⁵⁹⁵ Barbara Surk, 12 Candidates for Syrian Rebel Interim Premier, *The Sandiego Union Tribune*, March 17, 2013, accessed March 17, 2017, <http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/sdut-12-candidates-for-syrian-rebel-interim-premier-2013mar17-story.html>.

⁵⁹⁶ Aleppan machines and textile businessman no60, personal interview, Gaziantep, January 27, 2015.

party defines itself as “an independent national party with an Islamic and centrist framework [*marjaiyyah*], and work to consolidate the principles of freedom and justice, by democratic means.”⁵⁹⁸

Sa‘ad Wifā’ī who was from Aleppo and used to have a medicine factory in Idlib worked as the Secretary-General of Waad.⁵⁹⁹ In 2006 he and his friends visited the Syrian government trying to persuade them to reform the country, but they failed and he was banned from traveling out of Syria. When the revolution erupted in 2011, the government arrested him directly due to his previous political activities. He left Syria for Turkey in September 2012.⁶⁰⁰

Another Aleppan medicine industrialist who used to work in the medicine industry also joined Waad. In 1982, two of his uncles were imprisoned by the Assad regime due to the Muslim Brotherhood uprising in Syria. He participated in the protest in Aleppo in 2012, and the regime then threatened him. Afterwards, he fled to Belarus but later returned to the city of al-Bāb and took the post of managing foreign relations in the Civil revolutionary council in the city of Bāb and its countryside. With the expansion of ISIS in his city, he left Syria and relocated to Gaziantep, Turkey in February 2014.⁶⁰¹

⁵⁹⁷ Aleppan medicine industrialist no54, personal interview, Gaziantep, January 20, 2015. Who he is also a founding member of Waad, January 20, 2015; Raphaël Lefèvre, New Leaders for the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, *Carnegie Middle East Center*, December 11, 2014, accessed March 17, 2017, <http://carnegie-mec.org/2014/12/11/new-leaders-for-syrian-muslim-brotherhood-pub-57453>.

⁵⁹⁸ *Waad Party*.

⁵⁹⁹ “Sa‘ad Wifā’ī,” [Sa‘ad Wifā’ī] *Geroun*, December 7, 2016, accessed March 17, 2017, <http://www.geroun.net/archives/tag/%D8%B3%D8%B9%D8%AF-%D9%88%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%8A>.

⁶⁰⁰ Aleppan medicine industrialist no54, personal interview, Gaziantep, January 20, 2015.

⁶⁰¹ *Ibid*.

Syrian Business Forum (SBF)

The SBF was established by Syrian businessmen and women on 6 June 2012 as an independent and non-profit organisation, consisting of over 300 Syrian businessmen and women inside and outside of Syria, though mostly exiled Syrian businessmen based in the Arab Gulf.⁶⁰² Its aims are “finding an umbrella which includes the largest number of Syrian businessmen and businesswomen inside and outside Syria, who are seeking to develop the Syrian economy to reach modern Syrian, country of flourishing and prosperous.”⁶⁰³ On 6 June 2012, the SBF announced the financial support for the Syrian revolution worth \$300 million in Doha, Qatar.⁶⁰⁴ The president of SBF Muṣṭafā Ṣabbāgh stated that “we supported the Free [Syrian] Army to protect civilians.”⁶⁰⁵ Moreover, the SBF was thought to be sponsored by the Qatari government to support the Syrian rebels.⁶⁰⁶

In addition to Muṣṭafā Ṣabbāgh, another Aleppan businessman who worked in the glasses industry also took an administrative position in the SBF in the humanitarian and civil training sections. He personally participated in the protest in Aleppo during the revolution, was imprisoned four times and had his name on the wanted list of the

⁶⁰² Syrian Business Forum; Samer Abboud, *Syria's Business Elite: Between Political Alignment and Hedging Their Bets*, *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, German Institute for International and Security Affairs* (2013) 7.

⁶⁰³ *Syrian Business Forum*.

⁶⁰⁴ “Sūriyūn yunshi' ūn ṣundūqan li-da'am al-thawra,” [Syrians create a fund to support the revolution] *Al-Jazeera*, June 6, 2012, accessed March 17, 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.net/news/ebusiness/2012/6/6/%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%B4%D8%A6%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%B5%D9%86%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%82%D8%A7-%D9%84%D8%AF%D8%B9%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AB%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A9>.

⁶⁰⁵ Fund Launched to Back Syrian Rebels, *Al-Jazeera*, June 7, 2012, accessed March 17, 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/06/201266133319930526.html>.

⁶⁰⁶ Elizabeth Dickinson, *Godfathers and Thieves: How Syria's Diaspora Crowd-Sourced a Revolution* (Deca, 2015).

Syrian regime. He left Syria to Turkey in the summer of 2013 after his release from the prison. Finally, a Kurdish Aleppo pipeline businessman joined the SBF as a consultant. He left Syria for Turkey at the end of 2011 due to the fragile economic condition in the country.

Syrian Economic Forum (SEF)

The SEF was established by a group of Syrian businessmen with the Centre for International Private Enterprise (CIPE) in March 2012.⁶⁰⁷ The SEF works on “promoting and strengthening the Syrian economy for a democratic and sustainable development.”⁶⁰⁸ They also hold conferences and communicate with Turkish officials for promoting Syrian businessmen’s investments in Turkey. For instance, they discussed the suggestions of establishing a free industrial zone in Turkey for Syrian investors.⁶⁰⁹

Ayman Ṭabbā‘ who was from Damascus and completed his bachelor degree in the US work in property development. He was the chairman of the SEF and was imprisoned

⁶⁰⁷ The Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE) strengthens democracy around the globe through private enterprise and market-oriented reform, accessed March 17, 2017, <http://www.cipe.org/>.

⁶⁰⁸ *Syrian Economic Forum*.

⁶⁰⁹ Free Industrial Zones in Syria, SEF President Ayman Tabbaa, *Syrian Economic Forum*, September 30, 2013, accessed March 17, 2017, <http://www.syrianef.org/En/2013/09/free-industrial-zones-in-syria-sef-president-ayman-tabbaa/>; Turkey Hosts the First Syrian Economic Forum, *Syrian Economic Forum*, December 19, 2013, accessed March 17, 2017, <http://www.syrianef.org/En/2013/12/turkey-hosts-the-first-syrian-economic-forum/>; Final Statement of the First Conference of the Syrian Economic Forum, *Syrian Economic Forum*, December 20, 2013, accessed March 13, 2017, <http://www.syrianef.org/En/2013/12/final-statement-of-the-first-conference-of-the-syrian-economic-forum/>.

by the regime for his activities with them.⁶¹⁰ Tamām al-Bārūdī who was the Executive Vice President of the SEF was from Hama and used to work in the field of construction and agriculture, and he had a factory for cutting tools in Syria. He and his family left for Saudi Arabia in 1964 due to the nationalisation of the Ba’th party. In 1985 he embarked on investments in Aleppo. Another Aleppan food industrialist who was also a founding member of the SEF, was mentioned earlier. His father was killed in the 1980s incident and he himself was also the founder of the ‘Appeal from Aleppo for the country.’⁶¹¹ He was arrested by the regime due to his active participation in the protests. He left Syria for Egypt in September 2012, and in the end of 2012 moved to Turkey.⁶¹²

Although the aims of the SEF do not include having a political agenda regarding the on going conflict, it considers itself a non-governmental organisation. Its two leading figures and other members illustrated above were suppressed by the Assad regime prior to 2011. The active engagement with the local government to discuss economic policy, such as the creation of a free industrial zone in Turkey, demonstrates the politicised feature of the organisation.

Tayyār “al-wa‘d al-Sūrī (the Syrian Promise)

The Syrian Promise was established in November 2014. Firās Ṭallās, the son of the former Syrian Minister of Defence, stated that its aim was to “put up a road map

⁶¹⁰ Board of Directors & Staff, *Syrian Economic Forum*, accessed, March 17, 2017, <http://www.syrianef.org/En/board-members/>; Aleppan construction businessman no61, personal interview, Gaziantep, May 27, 2014. He is also a member from the SBF.

⁶¹¹ Aleppan dessert industrialist no15, personal interview, Gaziantep, January 02, 2015.

⁶¹² Ibid.

allowing each Syrian to live in the homeland that looks like them [they familiar with].”⁶¹³ The Syrian Promise also worked on projects for helping Syrians who were living in the free area inside Syria (the rebels held area).⁶¹⁴ According to one of the members of the Syrian Promise, the organisation was funded by Syrian tycoon Firās Ṭallās.⁶¹⁵

Ṭallās was from Homs. His father was the former Minister of Defence Muṣṭafā Ṭallās who also used to be close with Hafiz al-Assad.⁶¹⁶ He left Syria in March 2012 to Paris.⁶¹⁷ At the time, his expatriation from Syria was considered to be a betrayal against the Syrian regime.⁶¹⁸ Ṭallās was one of the business tycoons in Syria prior to the 2011 revolution who was listed on the 100 prominent businessmen list in 2009 and 2010.⁶¹⁹ But after he left Syria, he announced his political position against the Bashar regime.⁶²⁰

Coordination of the Syrian Revolution in Egypt (CCSRE)

The Coordination was established by Nizār Kharāt and other Syrians between 2011 and 2013 in Egypt. Under the rule of president Morsi in Egypt, the Coordination used to have great cooperation with the Egyptian government before the military coup in

⁶¹³ “ta’sīs tayyār “al-wa’d al-Sūrī,” [The founding of the current “the Syrian promise”] *Dp-news*, April 11, 2014, accessed March 17, 2017, <http://www.dp-news.com/pages/detail.aspx?articleid=161795>.

⁶¹⁴ tayyār “al-wa’d.

⁶¹⁵ Aleppo lawyer, personal interview, Gaziantep, December 1, 2014.

⁶¹⁶ “Profile: Mustafa Tlass.”

⁶¹⁷ “Firas Tlass,” *Revolvy*, accessed March 17, 2017, <https://www.revolvy.com/main/index.php?s=Firas%20Tlass>.

⁶¹⁸ “Interview with Firas Tlass.”

⁶¹⁹ “abraz 100 rajul a ‘māl Sūrī,” 2009, 2010.

⁶²⁰ “Interview with Firas Tlass.”

2013. They worked in relief and help for Syrians in Egypt. Around 700,000 Syrians living in Egypt received help from them.⁶²¹

Nizār Kharāṭ was from Damascus, but he has been in Egypt for 47 years. He used to work in the field of furniture, services, and travels. Because of his participation in the anti-Assad regime activities in Egypt, when Sisi succeeded as president, he was forced to leave Egypt for Turkey.⁶²²

Finally, Gazwan Masri, who was originally from Aleppo, left Syria for Turkey in 1983 where he eventually gained Turkish nationality.⁶²³ His business investments mainly focus on trade, agencies, and marketing in Turkey and the Middle East countries. He was the President of the board of directors of the Santral Group.⁶²⁴ He was a member of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood.⁶²⁵ Also, he was the former vice president of the MÜSIAD in Turkey, which was “formed to be a direct competitor with TÜSİAD [Turkish Industry and Business Association].”⁶²⁶ MÜSIAD is made up of pro-Islamic Turkish business groups, whereas TÜSİAD is made up of secular Turkish business groups.⁶²⁷ In addition, his close ties with the president of Turkey, Tayyip Erdogan, was also well-known, as “he is said to have served as Turkey Prime

⁶²¹ “Nizār Kharāṭ li-niyūz santar.”

⁶²² Ibid.

⁶²³ “Ülke Tanıtım Toplantıları,” [Country Promotion Meetings], *Igiad*, May 8, 2017, accessed March 17, 2017, <http://igiad.com/faaliyet/ulke-tanitim-toplantilari-2/>; “Eğitim için geldikleri Türkiye, onların yeni vatanı olduKaynak: Eğitim için geldikleri Türkiye, onların yeni vatanı oldu,” *Risale Haber*, July 27, 2009, accessed March 17, 2017, <http://www.risalehaber.com/egitim-icin-geldikleri-turkiye-onlarin-yeni-vatani-oldu-59474h.htm>.

⁶²⁴ Santral Group, accessed March 17, 2017, <http://www.santral-group.com/en/about.html>.

⁶²⁵ Syria Media Roundup (November 25), *Jadaliyya*, November 25, 2014, accessed May 5, 2017, <http://egypt.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/20082/maghreb.jadaliyya.com/maghreb.jadaliyya.com/>.

⁶²⁶ Hamza Fakher, Michael Weiss, and Brian Milne, *Revolution in Danger: A Critical Appraisal of the Syrian National Council with Recommendations for Reform*, A Henry Jackson Society Strategic Briefing, *The Henry Jackson Society* (2012) 13, accessed March 17, 2017, <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/SNC.pdf>.

⁶²⁷ Yıldız Atasoy, *Islam's Marriage with Neoliberalism: State Transformation in Turkey* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) 16.

Minister Tayyip Erdogan's personal financier."⁶²⁸ After the Syrian revolution erupted in March 2011, the Syrian oppositions held a conference regarding the civil uprising inside Syria. This conference was organised by MÜSIAD but the *Hürriyet Daily News* stated that Misri himself was the financier and real organizer.⁶²⁹ His political position was also anti-regime and he stood with the Syrian revolution.⁶³⁰

b. Motivations and patterns of political participations

We were doing good to be honest with you [before the revolution], and the business was great. Until the revolution started, then we felt that what's happening was not the right thing to do, especially when the killing started. So during living in Syria, and dealing with the government and dealing with the laws in Syria, we of course, as everybody knows, there was a lot of corruptions in Syria, and the economy does not have any identity that we can even recognize...laws has been changing on a daily basis. So when the revolution started, me and a couple of, not a couple, a few of business people, and businessmen and women from Syria, we decided that we going to try to do something about it. Anything about the reform of the develop of Syria, and implementing democracy in Syria.

- Ayman Tabaa, Chairman of the SEF in Gaziantep⁶³¹

⁶²⁸ J. Millard Burr, Turkey- Syria: Muslim Brother Misirli's Reckoning, *ACDemocracy: American Center for Democracy*, November 4, 2014, accessed March 17, 2017, <http://acdemocracy.org/turkey-syria-muslim-brother-misirli-reckoning/>.

⁶²⁹ Sevil Küçükkoşum, Syria 'Offended' by Turkish PM's Statement, Envoy Says, *Hürriyet Daily News*, May 17, 2011, accessed March 17, 2017, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/archive-news-detail.aspx?pageid=438&n=syria-offended-turkish-leaders-comparison-with-halepche-envoy-says-2011-05-17>.

⁶³⁰ An Interview with Syrian Businessman Gazi Misirli (Gazwan Masri), *ORSAM* (2013) accesses March 17, 2017, <http://www.orsam.org.tr/files/OA/49/15gazimisirli.pdf>.

⁶³¹ Democracy that Delivers Podcast #30: Syrian Economic Forum on the Role of the Private Sector in Syria's Reconstruction, *CIPE* (August 23, 2016) 2:16 – 3:15, accessed March 17, 2017, <http://www.cipe.org/blog/2016/08/23/democracy-that-delivers-podcast-30-syrian-economic-forum-on-the-role-of-the-private-sector-in-syrias-reconstruction/#.WHYagBt942w>.

As previously mentioned, it was risky for Syrian businessmen to partake in anti-regime related political activities due to the possible suppressions from the regime, yet there were still 18 expatriate Syrian businessmen who publicly and actively partook in the anti-regime political activities. Table 6.1 below is based on these 18 politicised expatriate Syrian businessmen's backgrounds and their positions in these organisations and broad political coalitions. It indicates the different posts and profiles of the 18 expatriate Syrian businessmen and political organisations, namely: what types of work they were doing in the organisations; their names and backgrounds; where they were from in Syria; when they left Syria; whether they or their families were suppressed by the Assad regime and whether they participated in political activities; and their posts in the organisations.

This table shows that the political participation of the expatriate Syrian businessmen can be divided into two groups: those who left Syria prior to the 2011 revolution, and those who left after. Their activities were primarily practiced in three patterns: main leaders of the organisations, including the posts of presidents, vice presidents, or the ministers; those who took important posts in the organisations, such as being the founding members or consultants; those who would be the main financial funders of these organisations.

D 632	F ⁶³³	Name	S 634	L 635	E 636	SNC	SOC	SIG	Waad	SBF	SEF	SP	CCSRE
Pre 637	Damascus	Ayman Ṭabbāʿ	√	√							Chairman		
	Damascus	Nizār Kharāṭ		√									Founder/ president
	Aleppo	Maḥmūd ʿUthmān	√			Founding member							
	Hama	Tamām al-Bārūdī	√	√							Executive Vice-Chair		
	Daraa	Walīd al-Zuʿbi		√		Member		Minister					
	Lattakia	Muṣṭafā Ṣabbāgh	√	√		Founder/ member	Secretary-ge neral			Founding member/ President			
Post 638	Damascus	Riyāḍ Sayf	√	√	√		Vice-preside nt				The Advisory Council		
	Damascus	Ezzat Baghdadi	√		√	Member							
	Aleppo	Yāsīn al-Najjār	√	√	√	Founder/ member		Minister					
	Aleppo	Yāsīr Dhākīrī	√		√		Representati						

⁶³² D indicates the date of departure from Syria

⁶³³ F indicates Syrian city of origin

⁶³⁴ S indicates whether they or their families were suppressed by the Assad regime or not, in the forms of arrest, prison, torture, or death

⁶³⁵ L indicates the businessman took the leading post

⁶³⁶ E indicates that the businessman has experiences in political participations prior to their departure from Syria

⁶³⁷ Pre indicates leaving Syria before the 2011 revolution

⁶³⁸ Post indicates leaving Syria after the 2011 revolution

						ve in Gaziantep							
Aleppo	Aleppan machines and textile businessman			√			Consultant						
Aleppo	Sa'ad Wifā'ī	√		√				Secretary-ge neral					
Aleppo	Aleppan medicine industrialist	√		√				Member					
Aleppo	Aleppan glasses industrialist	√		√					Administrato r				
Aleppo	Kurdish Aleppan pipeline businessman								Consultant				
Aleppo	Aleppan food industrialist	√		√						Administrato r			
Homs	Firās Ṭallās		√								Founder/ General Counsel		
Latakia	Latakia foods and clothes businessman	√				Member							

Table 6.1 Political participation of 18 politicised expatriate Syrian businessmen

Long-term exiled Syrian businessmen

The reason that the six long-term exiled Syrian businessmen listed in the table left the country was their dissatisfaction of the Assad regime's ways of governing or having been suppressed by the regime. Four had experienced political suppression or persecutions by the regime. They had lived abroad for between ten and forty years prior to the revolution in Syria. They either resented the regime for what the regime had done to them or to their family, or they were discontent with the previous governance of the regime and chose other countries for their economic investments. Tamām al-Bārūdī stated that,

[After the Ba'th party came into power in 1963,] my family left Syria for Saudi Arabia. I was child at that time. So because they get everything what we are, what we own. My father was a rich man; he had agencies for big companies, and he has big land, my cousins, all our families, they [the regime] get everything from us. So from that time we hate al-Ba'th party, when Hafiz al-Assad came, uh, we don't like him. Me, my father, all my family, or my wife at the moment, from the beginning we don't like these kind of people. Anyway, at 1982, Hafiz al-Assad killed 48,000 people in Hama.⁶³⁹

Nevertheless, when the uprising started in Syria in 2011, they did not immediately become involved in anti-regime political activities as other Syrian businessmen who were in in Syria at the time. Rather, they mostly embarked on anti-regime political activities after mid-2012 once the opposition in Syria had reached a better position. Maḥmūd 'Uthmān, who left Syria in 1983 and has been based in Istanbul since, stated

⁶³⁹ Democracy that Delivers Podcast, 12:28 – 13:19.

how he became one of the founding members of the Syrian National in September 2011,

In 1983, due to the dangerous situation in Aleppo, my brother suggested that I go to Turkey. I came here [to Istanbul] to study engineering. In 1992, I started my business, in the field of general international trading and some dessert industries. When the revolution started in Syria, we knew that the conflict would continue since many people who were just like us have been suppressed by the regime for decades and have been waiting for this moment to happen. At that time, the Turkish government also wanted us to form a political organization to support the revolution. Then I stopped working for my business for one and a half years. I feel that I should participate to change this unjust regime.⁶⁴⁰

Due to their long-term periods of living abroad, those businessmen have less concern regarding further retaliation from the regime on their properties or relatives in Syria. On the other hand, the investments and relatives of the Syrian businessmen who were based in Syria for most of their lives were mostly in the country. Given the long-term resentment and lack of potential ‘targets’ that the regime might attack, the chances that they would join the revolution were higher. More importantly, leading roles in the parties and organisations were mostly taken by long-term exiles.

Out of the eight Syrian businessmen who took leading posts in the anti-Assad political organisation, five were long-term exiles. The leading positions of anti-Assad organizations were mostly long-term exiles because they were more capable in terms of their economic, political, and social status. Economically, their investments did not suffer great damage. Politically, they would not encounter the threat of suppression from the regime. Socially, they were bilingual and possessed dual citizenship (or had

⁶⁴⁰ Aleppan general trade businessman no62, personal interview, Istanbul, March 10, 2015.

long-term residential permits in another country) which facilitated their further anti-Assad political. Maḥmūd ‘Uthmān left Syria for Turkey in the early 1980s. Ayman Ṭabbā‘ has US nationality and was fluent in English. Muṣṭafā Ṣabbāgh and Tamām al-Bārūdī both have lived in Gulf countries, namely, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, for more than a decade. Nizār Kharāt embarked on investment in Egypt almost five decades ago. Walīd al-Zu‘bi left Syria for the UAE in the 1990s.

Furthermore, their long-term residence in these countries made it easier for them to access or cooperates with local or foreign authorities or organisations to seek resources, whether economic, political, or human resources, for their political activities, and vice versa for the local authorities to contact them. The case of the establishment of the SBF through the interactions with the Qatari authority, the cooperation with the Centre for International Private Enterprise for setting up the SEF, and the cooperation between the CCSRE with the Morsi government regarding the political affairs are all examples of this.

Since those figures were comparatively safer and more socially-economically stable than the Syrian businessmen based in Syria, they had a higher chance of leading anti-regime political organisations or parties. Thus, it was not only because they had left Syria longer ago and did not have significant properties or relatives inside Syria anymore, but also because they had a resentment of the regime for suppressing them and their families and a higher possibility of accessing foreign resources that made it possible for those Syrian businessmen to participate in anti-regime political activities.

Businessmen who left after 2011

Out of the remaining 12 Syrian businessmen, nine personally took part in other social or political activities before taking positions in these political parties or organisations before and after the 2011 revolution. This shows a different picture from what previous studies have shown, that people who left their homeland more recently may also actively engage in homeland politics from abroad.⁶⁴¹ For example, the Aleppan food industrialist who was working in the SEF was also the founding member of ‘Appeal from Aleppo for the country’ after the eruption of the revolution in Syria.⁶⁴² They were more sophisticated in motivating and participating in social or political activities than other fellow businessmen. Furthermore, during their emigration from Syria, either they brought most of their relatives and capital with them, or their investments had been destroyed.

Finally, nine out of 12 personally experienced political suppressions from the regime before and after the eruption of the revolution. This long-term suppression by the regime encouraged them to take part in the anti-regime activities. As stated by the Aleppan medicine industrialist who was also a member of the Waad, “We were suppressed during the 1980s by the [Assad regime’s] brutal killing. Around 50 people from our family were imprisoned, and another 100 people from our family fled Aleppo.”⁶⁴³

⁶⁴¹ Wahlbeck, *Kurdish Diasporas*; Fuglerud, *Life on the Outside*; Wayland, “Ethnonationalist Networks”; Tyner and Kuhlke, “Pan-national Identities”; Lesch, “Palestinians in Kuwait”; Gillespie, “Edward Sayre and Liesl Riddle”; Lindholm and Hammer, *The Palestinian Diaspora*; Cohen, “From Ethnonational Enclave to Diasporic Community”; Weingrod and Levy, “Social Thought and Commentary”; Pattie, “Longing and Belonging”; Manaseryan, *Diaspora: the Comparative Advantage for Armenia*.

⁶⁴² Aleppan dessert industrialist no15, personal interview, Gaziantep, January 02, 2015.

⁶⁴³ Aleppan medicine industrialist no63, personal interview, Gaziantep, January 30, 2015.

Thus, the profiles of these 18 expatriate Syrian businessmen's political participations suggest that the reasons to take part in political activities were mainly long-term resentment and personal political suppressions by the regime, and the lack of relatives or properties for the regime to target. Furthermore, most leading position roles in these political activities were taken by long-term exiled businessmen since not only did they have fewer concerns about future repressions by the regime, but they also had a higher chance for accessing foreign aid – whether economic or political – to support their activities. The Syrian businessmen who left after 2011 mostly had a stronger sense or experience in the political participation prior to or during the 2011 revolution. Finally, the participation of Syrian businessmen who left Syria prior to 2011 in the political activities were more diversified than the Syrian businessmen who left after 2011 in terms of their city origins. The members of the latter group were mostly from Aleppo since Aleppo experienced greater damage and conflict between the regime forces and the rebels. As such, those businessmen have less concern about further risk against their properties.

These different political organisations and parties not only demonstrate a new wave of the long-term, low-politicised businessmen who took part in anti-Assad political participations, but also show that the political participation of expatriate Syrian businessmen was formed from a mixture between the old and new expatriate Syrian businessmen. Nevertheless, it was only when the social, economic, and political conditions of the Syrian businessmen were safe and stable, and with the long-term dissatisfaction or personally suppression, that they would partake in anti-Assad political activities.

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that the expatriate Syrian businessmen were actively participating in philanthropic and political activities in the host countries. Due to the culture of charitable participation and social responsibility which was imposed on them by their fellow countrymen, Syrian businessmen routinely engaged in philanthropic activities in the host countries to help their fellow countrymen inside and outside of Syria, after their resettlement into the host lands. Nevertheless, different from the previous studies, they not only contributed to their fellow countrymen in the home country, but also provided aid to those who relocated to the host countries after 2011. Moreover, not only had the businessmen who settled outside of Syria decades ago contributed to philanthropic activities, but so did those who left Syria after 2011.

Furthermore, the eruption of the 2011 revolution not only divided the Syrian businessmen into different political groups, but it also made at least 18 expatriate Syrian businessmen partake in various important roles in anti-regime organisations and broad coalitions. The reasons they took risks and participated in these activities were their long-term resentment and personal suppression by the regime which had started in the 1970s. Only the businessmen who had few properties or relatives in Syria would partake in these political roles since the fear of further political suppressions deterred other businessmen. Even though the number of expatriate Syrian businessmen who personally took part in these anti-regime activities was not great, the division of political ideas and the 18 Syrian businessmen who became important figures in these organisations and coalitions demonstrate a political

emancipation for the long-term low-politicised Syrian business community. More importantly, the political participation of expatriate Syrian businessmen in their homeland politics also shows that not only did those who left longer ago participate and contribute, but so did those who left more recently.

In addition, the networks not only facilitated the philanthropic and political activities of the expatriate Syrian businessmen, but the examination of their networks of charities and politics also indicated that their activities no longer remained local; rather, they had risen to cross-border or even transnational levels. More importantly, the Syrian businessmen who left Syria decades ago also contributed to these activities and cooperated with the newly expatriate Syrian businessmen.

Finally, even though the philanthropic and political activities of the expatriate Syrian businessmen demonstrate their charitable continuation and their political emancipation, the fear of the regime's transnational suppression, the previous fragmented networking and the lack of willingness to relate to political events still affected the expatriate Syrian businessmen. This reaffirms that although the behaviour and ideas of the expatriate Syrian businessmen have changed in certain ways, some specific ways of thinking and acting remained the same and continued to affect them.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

After the eruption of the 2011 revolution in Syria, thousands of Syrian businessmen fled to Turkey, Egypt, and Jordan. As shown previously, the amount of emigration of Syrian businessmen not only indicates a huge outflow of businessmen themselves, but also billions of US dollars to the host countries. With the escalation of conflict inside Syria, most expatriate Syrian businessmen have already started their new life in the host countries and actively engage in and work on different economic investments and philanthropic and political activities. The emergence of the expatriate Syrian business community after 2011 not only shows a great loss of economic capital from Syria, but the activities in the host countries also demonstrate the economic, social, and political dynamic and resilience of the war-induced expatriate Syrian businessmen.

The networks of the Syrian business community have been fragmented under the rule of the Assad family since the 1970. Nevertheless, Syrian businessmen developed their own specific ways of enhancing this fragmented network. They used to spend most of their efforts on business investment prior to the 2011 revolution, and actively contributed to charities and only participated to a limited extent in political activities. After the break out of the civil uprising in 2011 and their later emigration out of Syria, Syrian businessmen demonstrated their abilities and energies not only in the economic field, but also in philanthropic and political activities. Their emigration and settlement indicated that they still were not able to rid themselves of their former specific ways of thinking and acting which accompanied them during the emigration and continued to affect their later activities in the host lands. Nevertheless, the Syrian business community is heading towards a formation of long-term war-induced business

diaspora as a consequence of the 2011 revolution since the domestic conflict did not show any sign of ending and they established new careers in the host countries. This further indicates that this business diaspora was going through a reorganisation of their business networks, that new investments were established in the host countries, that they continue to contribute to philanthropic activities, and that a political emancipation merged through this business community transformation by the 2011 revolution.

This thesis has drawn on a range of former literature on Syrian business community and business diaspora to set up the framework of this research in a particular context: that of expatriate Syrian businessmen in Turkey, Egypt, and Jordan. On the one hand, former literature on Syrian business community has demonstrated the important role of the Syrian businessmen in Syria prior to the year of 2011, and their symbiotic but lack of trust relationships with the Assad regime. On the other hand, the former study on business diaspora analysed the ties between the business diaspora with their home and host countries, and the impacts they made on their home or host governments. The aim of this research was to examine how the Syrian business community has been transformed through the 2011 revolution, focusing on expatriate Syrian businessmen in Turkey, Egypt, and Jordan. I argue that not only are the Syrian business networks reorganising from a fragmented network to more cooperative networks, but also that the networks have risen to a transnational level to include businessmen who are living in different host countries; and the unprecedented massive and prompt outflow of Syrian businessmen and their economic capital from Syria, along with the escalation and prolongation of the conflict in Syria, the expatriate Syrian business community is developing into a long-term, war-induced business diaspora.

Five principle findings have been demonstrated throughout the thesis. Two of the findings contribute to the studies on Syrian businessmen: the attributes of the fragmented business networks in pre-2011 Syria, and the context of the political division and participation of Syrian businessmen during the 2011 revolution. The other three findings address the studies on migration and diaspora: the significance of the economic considerations of Syrian businessmen regarding their relocations has been shown to overpass what previous studies have suggested about the influence of personal networks regarding migration; the importance of political relations between the host and home governments, in addition to the factors during the relocation and settlement process; and the specific ways of thinking and acting have migrated with businessmen and continue to affect them.

The important economic roles of the Syrian business community in pre-2011 Syria have been shown through work on the Syrian political economy and business networks between state-business ties. This research has not only revised how the previous Syrian political economic environment affected the operations of the Syrian business community and led to the low-trust but symbiotic ties between the state and its business community, but it has also argued that the networks among the Syrian businessmen were fragmented between large numbers of businessmen's small networks that did not trust each other, but within which were networks with a high level of trust. This fragmented networking among the Syrian business community was mainly caused by the previous political economic environment in Syria. Corruption combined with nepotism, injustice accompanied by state intervention into businessmen's activities, and a lack of efficiency and opaqueness in the public sectors

were the three main factors that made this network fragmented. The fragmented nature of the business networks restricted interactions among Syrian businessmen in Syria prior to 2011. Nevertheless, they have developed specific civil mechanisms such as informal arbitration and non-interest loans to address their lack of trust of each other.

I have re-categorised Syrian businessmen into the ruling family, the crony, the strategic, and the independent businessmen based on their ties with the Assad regime in the pre-revolution era. The main contribution of this re-categorisation is the inclusion of the majority low-profile and modest businessmen who also had important economic roles in pre-2011 Syria, which most previous literature on the Syrian business community has neglected. Each of the four types of Syrian businessmen also reacted differently to their different degrees of dependency and ties with the Assad regime during the revolution. The fact that the long-term, non-politicised Syrian business community has been divided into different political groups throughout the revolution has also been demonstrated. After the eruption of the 2011 revolution, some Syrian businessmen played important roles in the civil uprising, especially in funding and humanitarian aid. Most Syrian businessmen who participated in the revolution did so due to their long-term dissatisfaction against with and their personal experiences of suppression by the Assads. Speculating the results of the revolution also encouraged some Syrian businessmen to take part. Nevertheless, due to the worsening situation of security, economy, and politics in Syria, most Syrian businessmen had no choice but to leave. The phenomenon of the limited Syrian businessmen who took part in anti-regime political activities during the revolution in

Syria and the massive outflow of businessmen from Syria suggest that the pre-revolution symbiotic state-business relationships were wavering.

The personal networks of migrants and diasporans have been argued to be an important factor which enhances or decreases the motivations of potential migrants or diasporans to settle or relocate into the host countries. Nevertheless, expatriate Syrian businessmen who emigrated from Syria to the host countries after 2011 had utmost consideration that was not whether they had acquaintances in the countries into which they attempted to move or not. Rather, it was under their economic calculation about the possibilities for their future investment. As shown in chapter 4, even brothers in a business family or business partners would not choose to relocate to the same countries unless they could sense the chances to embark on new economic investments. This may be due to their pre-departure professions that they looked forward to continue working on, and the economic capital they still had with them.

Although previous studies on migration and diaspora demonstrate how the home/ host countries affect the development of the migrants and diasporans, the way the relations between the host and home countries affect the migrants and diasporans is understudied. The process of the relocation and settlement of Syrian businessmen showed that not only did the host country play an important role in their relocation and settlement, but so did the political relations between the host and home governments. Syrian businessmen not only encountered and needed to deal with various issues from legal, social, or political perspectives in the host countries, but they also needed to adjust to the local institutions and business cultures. If the home and host governments were in opposite political positions, then the host governments

would be more willing to accept the migrants; if the home and host governments had the same political position, then the host governments would be more unfriendly toward the migrants. Also, different from the former war-induced migration whereby social ties of emigrants played a crucial role in deciding where or how to relocate, the main factor which affected the emigration process of the Syrian businessmen was economic.

Businessmen needed to adapt their behaviour to the local culture into which they had moved. Nevertheless, although expatriate Syrian businessmen did indeed change some of their business behaviours to accommodate to the new environments, the examination of their economic, philanthropic, and political activities demonstrates that the businessmen's activities were significantly affected by their former specific ways of thinking and acting which migrated with them. A reproduction of fear of the Assad regime, application of previous civil mechanisms, and features of fragmented regionalism are the businessmen's three specific ways of thinking and acting prior to their departures that can be observed from their behaviour in the host lands. The reason those three specific ways of thinking and acting still remain important is a dependence on context and assessment of risk. Most expatriate Syrian businessmen maintained their fear of the Assad regime if they still had close relatives or important properties inside Syria or if they were expecting to return to Syria after the conflict finishes. As such, if they acted against the regime, their actions might impeded their hope of return to the country. Furthermore, once the businessmen were newly arrived in the host lands and they encountered financial difficulties or business disputes with their fellow business countrymen, they preferred to use the previous civil mechanisms – the non-interest loans and informal arbitrations – to improve or solve

the issues since they were not confident that they could seek help from local financial or judicial institutions. Finally, the origin of the fragmented regionalism among the business community was due to fragmented trust in the previous Syrian environment. When they went through the war with great financial loss, they needed to minimise the chances of another wave of loss. Thus, their networking mostly remained regionally fragmented to ensure that they would not be cheated by their fellow business countrymen.

I have argued that the Syrian business networks were reorganising from fragmented business networks to more cooperative networks and have been transnationalised, and the Syrian business community has been developing into a long-term war-induced business diaspora.

First, the networks of expatriate Syrian businessmen have reorganised due to the lack of capital and the difficulties in Syria, where the businessmen were required to expand their former limited networks. Although fear and fragmented networks accompanied the Syrian businessmen out of Syria to the host countries, more than half have to enhance this fragmented trust and to expand their limited business partnerships with other businessmen. To improve this fragmented business network, family names and city origins are the two main factors for improving trust. Divisions based on political ideas also increased or decreased the trust of their networks. This suggests that their fragmented business networks are gradually expanding during their settlement in the exile. Nevertheless, the new expanded partnerships mostly remain regional, whereby the expatriate Syrian businessmen prefer to establish business partnerships with

businessmen who were from the same Syrian city as them. More importantly, the Syrian business networks have risen to a transnational level to include businessmen who are living in different host countries. This transnationalisation of the Syrian business networks can be observed not only from their economic activities, but also in their other different philanthropic and political activities in the host countries. The transnationalisation of Syrian business networks has strengthened their abilities and contributions to the fields of economic investment and philanthropic works.

Second, the expatriate Syrian business community is developing into a long-term business diaspora in the countries which they relocated into. Brubaker defines the diaspora as people who have the characteristics of dispersion, homeland orientation, and boundary-maintenance.⁶⁴⁴ The examination of the expatriate Syrian business community suggests that the expatriate Syrian business community also conform to this definition of diaspora. Syrian businessmen have relocated to different countries in the Middle East due to the Syrian conflict. Even if they were far away from their home country, their economic, philanthropic, and political activities were all strongly linked to Syria in a homeland orientation. Their economic and philanthropic works suggest that they preferred to maintain their Syrian ties rather than expand to include local ties. For instance, they preferred to have business partnerships with their fellow Syrian business countrymen, and their philanthropic works were also conducted through the cooperation between Syrian businessmen. And their political participation was all devoted to the on-going conflict in Syria.

⁶⁴⁴ Brubaker, "The 'Diaspora' Diaspora," 5-7.

Previous studies on business diaspora have demonstrated the important role of the business diaspora on their home country, especially in the field of economic contributions.⁶⁴⁵ As opposed to previous business diaspora literature which was about voluntary emigration and/or emigrants becoming entrepreneurs after emigrating, by analysing the emergence of the expatriate Syrian business community, it is a business diaspora which was formed as a result of domestic conflict that is examined in this thesis. The formation process of war-induced business diaspora, from their pre-departure within the home country, to their actual emigrations, and their later activities inside the host countries are also examined. The formation of business diaspora is not restricted to the voluntary or new entrepreneurships types. Even if the businessmen experienced conflicts in their country and later emigrated, the great numbers and prompt emigration of businessmen will lead to the formation of a business diaspora.

More importantly, although the war-induced business diaspora is understudied, the research does demonstrate that while massive emigration started, among the high numbers who were forced to leave their homeland, thousands had belonged to the economic class prior to their departures. Based on their greater economic capital and on their business skills and knowledge, they have a greater resilience for both economic abilities and actively contributing to philanthropic and political affairs. Most Syrian businessmen continued to take part in economic investments, but others switched their careers from business to philanthropic or political activities. Regarding

⁶⁴⁵ Alessandro Monsutti, "Cooperation, Remittances, and Kinship among the Hazaras," *Iranian Studies*, 37, no. 2 (2004): 220; Heather Williams, "Both Sides Now: Migrant Philanthropy, State Power, and the Struggle for Accountability in Zacatecas, Mexico," in *Politics from Afar: Transnational Diasporas and Networks*, ed. Terrence Lyons and Peter G. Mandaville (London: Hurst & Company, 2012) 59; Lyons, "Conflict-generated diasporas," 537.

their philanthropic activities, even though they experienced a great loss of economic capital because of the conflict, they continued to engage in philanthropic activities to help their fellow countrymen whether inside or outside of Syria. This was attributed to the culture of the Syrian business community helping needy people and the social expectations imposed on them by their fellow countrymen. The Syrian business community used to be politically low-profile or had limited political participation. The low-politicised business community experienced a political emancipation not only since the break out of the revolution, but also after the businessmen relocated. Some actively participated in anti-Assad political activities or even led political movements. The Syrian business community was one of the main economic elements in Syria prior to the 2011 revolution. Even after they left Syria, the billions of dollars capital and thousands businessmen leaving, and their active economic, philanthropic, and political engagements in the host countries made them important actors. They were different from the other forced migrants or war-induced refugees in terms of their economic, political, and social perspectives before their departures and their later resettlements.

The research provided an analysis of the Syrian business community from the pre-2011 revolution period to later reactions towards the civil uprising in 2011 and emigration from Syria, to their resettlement and new lives in host countries. The results not only provide a base for future study of the Syrian business community, but also give a case study of the formation of a war-induced business diaspora.

The research also demonstrated the importance of the triadic conceptual framework between the home country-host countries-diaspora. By examining the development of

the case of the expatriate Syrian business community through the triadic conceptual framework, it not only took the relationships between the home country-diaspora and the host countries-diaspora into analysis, but also included the crucial impacts of how the relations between the home-host governments could make on the war-induced business diaspora. This suggests that further studies could look at the business diaspora through this triadic lens. In addition to the Syrian business diaspora after the 2011 revolution, future studies could include the interactions between the old business diaspora and the new business diaspora. For instance, there were many Iraqi businessmen and companies established by the Iraqi businessmen in Turkey after the 2003 US invasion of Iraq. Even though the research did not discuss the interactions between Iraqi and Syrian business diasporas in Turkey, at least three Turkey-based Syrian businessmen had close business ties with Turkey-based Iraqi businessmen.⁶⁴⁶ The existence of the conflict-driven Iraqi business community in Turkey also confirms the argument made here that when a country experiences domestic conflict, the business class cannot avoid its effects and it also has to leave the home country for another. More importantly, even if the situation in the home country may become less chaotic, war-induced business communities may continue living and working in a host country.

Finally, since the expatriate Syrian business community is turning into a business diaspora and is actively taking part in economic, philanthropic, and political activities, future studies can also trace how those war-induced business diasporas contribute to and affect their economic, philanthropic, and political activities in the host countries.

⁶⁴⁶ Interviews and observations.

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